

Hawkins praises toxic cleanup at NAS

By MICHAEL BURKE
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Sen Paula Hawkins expressed satisfaction with the military's cleanup of its toxic waste problems during a short visit to the Pensacola Naval Air Station on Tuesday.

Hawkins also told reporters that for economic and strategic reasons, Pensacola is "the logical choice" for the location of a new Navy battle fleet.

Hawkins arrived at 3:15 p.m. at Sherman Field after visiting three other military bases with contaminated sites: Homestead Air Force Base near Miami, MacDill Air Force Base outside Tampa, and Jacksonville Naval Air Station.

Hawkins was briefed on the program used by the Navy to investigate old waste sites, including those created by decades of toxic waste dumping into pits, ponds and open dunnps.

The senator said the Defense Department is using its own money to finance numerous studies of its toxic waste problem. "I'm glad they're moving this fast, but they should move a little faster," she said.

Hawkins said military officials at every base she visited showed "a deep sense of citizenship." She also noted, however, that toxic waste has been found at virtually all of Florida's military installations.

At Eglin Air Force Base, for example, the Air Force studied 30 potentially contaminated sites in 1981. A state environmental official said Tuesday that the state and Eglin officials have agreed on further study of 19 Eglin sites.

Hawkins planned the tour to "investigate the many effective meth-

ods used by the military to expedite the cleanup of toxic waste sites in hopes of improving the Environmental Protection Agency Superfund program."

The Superfund program comes up for reauthorization by Congress in September. The senator said Floridians living near Superfund sites "should not be forced to wail over two years for toxic waste site cleanup to be completed, as is the case now."

Hawkins said she believes the military has moved faster on military waste sites than the EPA has on industrial dumps and toxic sites handled under Superfund. She said former EPA official Rita Lavelle sat on Superfund money for two years before she was forced out of office.

Hawkins' remarks about the pace and effectiveness of the military cleanup program were in contrast to

the criticism of the Pentagon's environmental efforts by state officials and other Congressmen.

In November of last year, a draft report by the General Accounting Office of Congress said the Pentagon had not completed a toxic waste cleanup at any military installation.

At that time, U.S. Rep. James Florio of New Jersey said the military's progress on its toxic waste problem has been "painfully slow."

And John Ruddell, chief of the Bureau of Operations for the Florida Department of Environmental Resources in Tallahassee, said Monday that the Defense Department, like the Superfund program, is moving very slowly in correcting waste site hazards.

Ruddell said the military's installation Restoration Program is "still

in the very beginning stages" in Florida.

Ruddell also observed that the "technical quality" of some of the work done by the military and its consultants "has not been real high." He said the consultants were not to blame as much as the budget restrictions placed on them by the Defense Department.

In Pensacola, the DER's special programs supervisor Tom Moody also agreed with Ruddell that the military cleanup in West Florida has been as slow, if not slower, than the cleanup of waste sites under the EPA Superfund.

Superfund money has been used in Pensacola to drain the waste water ponds at American Creosote Works. In October 1983, the EPA spent \$725,000 in Superfund money to drain and stabilize the site.

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