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NAS cleanup won't be a quick one

Centuries of doing the wrong things environmentally are now to be followed by decades — and perhaps centuries — of trying to undo those mistakes, many of which were committed in the great innocence of past industrial practices.

Many weren't innocently done, of course, and therein lies a sadder tale.

But whether innocently or purposely done, the cleanup of hazardous waste sites must be a major commitment of the global community for the foreseeable future.

The identification of 37 such sites at Pensacola Naval Air Station and the placement of the station on the Environmental Protection Agency's National Priorities List of Superfund sites in December was a grim reminder that the cleanup needs are everywhere, including our own community.

Dumping of byproducts from processes at the old Naval Air Rework Facility,

now the Naval Aviation Depot, joined buried construction debris and other hazardous wastes scattered across the base since the mid-1800s.

Even though the cleanup effort is a big one, the researchers believe that about 20 of the sites will be found to contain waste that is not toxic or hazardous in nature.

It won't be a job that will can be completed quickly and the experts say it may be 10 years before all the danger will be removed. More than 100 years of contaminants can't be removed overnight.

But it is encouraging to know that Ecology and Environment Inc. is now under contract and the job has begun to eliminate the waste sites.

Every journey of a thousand miles begins with one step, the old adage reminds us. Every step toward cleanup is a welcome one.

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