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Hazardous waste cleanup begins at NAS

First phase to cost \$750,000

By John Fritz
News Journal

Three of 37 hazardous waste sites that earned Pensacola Naval Air Station a spot on the national Superfund list should be cleaned up by the end of September, an environmental engineer says.

Ron Joyner said the cleanup for all three sites, which began Monday at an abandoned dump near Sherman Field aboard NAS, will cost \$750,000.

Heavy earth-moving equipment is being used to dig up 150 truckloads of petroleum-contaminated soil at the

former dump behind the Oak Grove campground.

The other two sites are a waste tank that is leaching heavy metal contaminants into a wetland and an abandoned wastewater treatment plant that once processed industrial wastes.

"None of the sites we have on base here pose any immediate health or environmental risk," base spokeswoman Michele Harrison said.

THE PRICE TAG to bring all 37 sites up to modern environmental standards, a job that could take another 15 years, will be about \$110 million, Joyner estimated.

Most of the sites first were identified in 1983 and are the result of decades of unwitting environmental abuse.

But the base was not added to the National Priorities List of the nation's most contaminated hazardous waste

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sites until December 1989.

Placement on the so-called "Superfund" list — as determined by federal officials — guarantees federal funding for cleanup.

It was not until 1990 that Oak Grove campers noticed a discolored patch of earth where weeds did not grow some 200 feet south of the campground on the shore of Pensacola Bay.

Test results indicated low to moderate concentrations of petroleum products, such as motor oil and wood preservatives.

Groundwater monitors sunk around the site determined the contaminants have not leached into the groundwater. But it was selected for special "time-critical" cleanup because of its prox-

imity to the campground, Harrison said.

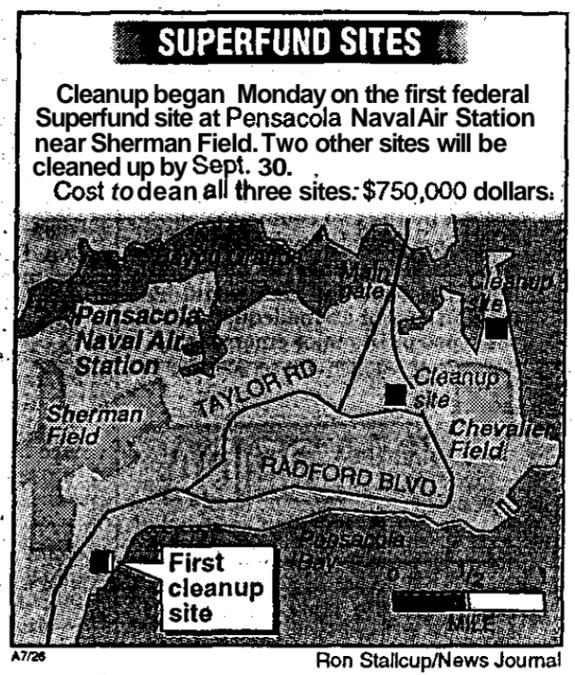
A "time-critical" or "interim" cleanup is defined as one taking place within six months of making a decision on what type of action is necessary, Harrison said.

About two feet of soil — some 1,500 cubic yards in all — will be removed at the site, which is about 300 feet in diameter. The contamination is confined to the top 12 to 18 inches, Joyner said.

HARRISON SAID it is not surprising the base is on the Superfund list, considering its long history of heavy industrial use. It was first developed as a shipyard in the early 1800s.

"You'll find most installations that had industrial type facilities or board are going to have some environmental contamination," she said. "The way

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we used to do things and dispose of things is obsolete."

In years past, for example, it was common practice to paint an aircraft, then dump the paint and solvents on the ground to find their way into the water.

After work at Oak Grove site is completed, base Public Works crews will start cleaning up the other two sites.

What is known as site 30 is a steel waste-receiving tank a b u t 8 feet square. It may have collected wastes from a plating operation from the 1940s to the 1970s.

HEAVY METAL byproducts from the plating process were found in the sediment in and around the tank and in the surrounding surface water. The tank is built in a swamp and during heavy rains, it is sometimes completely submerged, officials said.

The structure will be emptied and removed. Some 300 to 400 cubic yards of soil around it also probably will have to be dug out.

The former treatment plant, identified as Site 32 on maps, started treating sanitary sewer waste in 1941. It is located on Magazine Point Peninsula, north of Chevalier Field.

While the system was only designed for sanitary sewer, industrial waste from the same plating operations may have been disposed of through the treatment plant.

Sludge drying beds — found to contain concentrations of heavy metals and chemicals — a sedimentation tank and a chlorine contact chamber will be emptied and steam cleaned. Any wastewater created in the process will be captured and disposed of properly, officials said.