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Parts Of NTC Stay Open, Others Are Cleaned Up

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The 73-year-old Naval Training Center (NTC) is undergoing a deep transformation and cleanup — right down to its steam tunnels.

However, some citizens are worried that the cleanup won't be sufficient to ensure public safety, once the 500-acre base is converted to civilian use.

It was revealed at the March 25 meeting of NTC's Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) that toxic muck, composed of lead and copper, will be removed from the base's extensive system of underground steam pipes. The muck has collected and formed shallow pools inside various sections of the tunnels.

"The pipes are 50 years old, and it's probably taken about that long for the muck to accumulate," said Keith Forman, Environmental Coordinator for the U.S. Navy's Interim Base Realignment and Closure. Forman spoke at the March 25 meeting.

A three-phase study of the steam tunnels took about one year to complete. Conducted by the firm Bechtel National, Inc., it concluded that the waste did not come from the pipes themselves; however, it did not identify the source of the contamination.

Removing the toxic waste, sealing it in containers and dumping in a landfill will cost

up to \$136,000, which Forman said will be paid for by the Navy.

"What good does it do to remove the waste and not deal with the source of contamination?" said RAB member Z. Kripke. She said she was told by a Bechtel representative that the study indicated the contamination had to have come from outside the pipes, from the dirt right around them.

"So my question is, are you going to leave the source and then build residences right over it?" Kripke said. "And whoever gets this land, are they going to be told about it?"

Forman told RAB members it's not always possible to identify the source. "This happened

over 50 years, we've tested the soil (in various areas of the base), and there doesn't seem to be any base-wide problem creating this," he said.

According to Forman, the soil throughout NTC and much of the rest of the Peninsula area, is naturally high in another toxin: arsenic. "And it's nothing that the Navy did," he added.

He explained that a good deal of the Peninsula was man-made with material dredged from the bottom of San Diego Bay. "And those sediments (from the dredged material) tend to be high in copper ... so we've got a lot of materials in the ground that didn't come from the Navy," Forman said.

Some RAB members still

worry. "I want this base to be made as safe as possible, and right now it's a mess," Kripke said.

Forman said a starting date for the cleanup of the muck in the steam pipes has not been set.

Other recent changes or announcements concerning NTC included the following:

- The Navy has said it is moving ahead with a plan to put a soil cap over the base's inactive landfill site.
- The NTC Commissary and the Naval Medical Clinic NTC are being kept open indefinitely.
- The city has said it plans to launch an aggressive marketing campaign later this year to attract long-term users of the NTC land.