



# PRESS RELEASE

## U.S. ARMY CHEMICAL MATERIALS AGENCY

**For Immediate Release:**  
June 2, 2005

**For More Information Contact:**  
Gregory Mahall  
U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency  
Public Affairs Office  
Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21010  
Phone: (410) 436-3629  
E-mail: [gregory.mahall@us.army.mil](mailto:gregory.mahall@us.army.mil)

### Media Update #1: Rocket Fire Investigation

**WHAT:** The U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency recently formed a rocket task force to perform an in-depth investigation into five fires that occurred in April and May at its Umatilla Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (UMCDF) in Oregon and Pine Bluff Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (PBCDF) in Arkansas. The fires occurred while processing drained GB-filled M55 rockets in an Explosive Containment Room designed specifically to contain such an event. There was never any danger to personnel or any release of agent to the environment.

Preliminary results from the task force assessing the design integrity of explosive containment rooms from the fires and the risk to the public of continued disposal of M55 rockets, including the increased frequency of fires, can be found in the accomplishments section.

**WHEN:** UMCDF experienced fires while processing rockets on April 7<sup>th</sup>; April 23<sup>rd</sup>; and May 18<sup>th</sup> of this year. PBCDF experienced similar fires while processing rockets on May 11<sup>th</sup> and May 22<sup>nd</sup>. All other sites have also experienced similar fires in rocket processing, but the frequency of the fires at both UMCDF and PBCDF has raised questions. In all cases when a fire occurred, the systems and safeguards designed into the chemical weapons disposal facilities, and the explosive containment rooms in particular, functioned as designed. In addition, workers trained for such incidents followed safety protocols. There was never any danger to personnel or any release of agent to the environment.

**WHO:** Mr. Michael Parker, Director of the U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency, appointed Mr. Gregory St. Pierre, Director of CMA's Risk Management, to lead the rocket task force. St. Pierre has 22 years of experience in chemical weapons risk mitigation and problem solving.

**CMA COMMENT:** CMA Director Michael Parker said, "We are committed to the safety of our work force, our communities surrounding the weapons facilities, and the environment. The rocket task force focused first on ensuring that the ECR design remains safe for our workers and the public after the recent fires."

**For more information,  
contact the  
Chemical Materials  
Agency Public  
Affairs Office.**

**[www.cma.army.mil](http://www.cma.army.mil)**



## **U.S. ARMY CHEMICAL MATERIALS AGENCY**

“Secondly, even with the increase in the frequency of rocket fires, the public is at reduced risk with continued M55 GB-filled rocket disposal destruction process rather than delayed disposal and extended storage. Both reports confirm that CMA’s path forward, to continue destroying the rockets is the safest, most efficient path to eliminating the risk that these weapons pose to our communities once and for all.”

“We will fulfill the national imperative to destroy all of the chemical weapons stored in the United States. However, we will always do it safely and with public risk minimized,” said Parker.

**ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS:** The rocket task force includes a mix of experts from CMA, Washington Group International (WGI), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Southwest Research Institute, Sandia National Laboratory, EG&G, and the U.S. Army Armament Engineering & Technology Center.

The task force will:

- Assess the recent fire events against the design basis of the chemical disposal facilities to ensure the continued integrity of the design and assess the risks of resuming normal rocket processing after the fires,
- Identify and develop modifications to reduce risk and downtime from fire events,
- Identify and develop modifications targeted at decreasing the frequency of occurrence of similar events, and,
- Assess propellant samples to determine if degradation can be identified to support recommendations or other corrective actions.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** In a preliminary report from the Corps of Engineers, a review of the ECR structure design showed that “the ECR structural integrity, including explosion containment capability, is not compromised by repeated inadvertent ignition of propellant events.” In addition, the performance and integrity of the duct system, blast valves, isolation valves and filters was found to be intact. An assessment of whether or not the increased frequency of fires increases the risk to the public from M55 rocket disposal operations demonstrated that the fires have an insignificant impact because “the design, construction and protection of the ECRs makes the risk of a room, building or heating, venting, air conditioning fire very low.”

**For more information,  
contact the  
Chemical Materials  
Agency Public  
Affairs Office.**

**[www.cma.army.mil](http://www.cma.army.mil)**

To date, preliminary assessments have indicated that the rockets remain stable in storage and through routine handling operations that bring them to the disposal process. At this point, all fires have been associated only with rockets involved in the actual shearing/disposal process.



# PRESS RELEASE

## U.S. ARMY CHEMICAL MATERIALS AGENCY

More information will be released as it becomes available.

-- 30 --

*The U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency is responsible for safely storing and eliminating the United States' aging chemical weapons and agent stockpiles and for the safe elimination of recovered chemical materiel.*

For more information,  
contact the  
Chemical Materials  
Agency Public  
Affairs Office.

[www.cma.army.mil](http://www.cma.army.mil)