



PRESS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CHEMICAL MATERIALS AGENCY

Umatilla Chemical Depot

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Depot destroys last GB nerve agent rocket

UMATILLA CHEMICAL DEPOT, Hermiston, Ore. – Workers at the Umatilla Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (UMCDF) achieved a significant milestone by safely destroying the last of 91,442 GB (sarin) nerve agent rockets and warheads originally stockpiled at the Umatilla Chemical Depot (UMCD). With the GB rockets gone, plus completion of two GB bomb campaigns earlier this year, public risk of continued storage of chemical weapons at the depot has been reduced by more than 90 percent.

The disposal facility safely destroyed the last sarin-filled M55 rocket in the Umatilla stockpile at 1:17 p.m. today. The facility processed its first rocket on September 8, 2004. The final enhanced onsite container (EONC) shipment of GB rockets from the depot storage area was completed Tuesday, Aug. 1.

“I’m extremely proud of Team Umatilla’s effort during the past two years,” said Lt. Col. Donna Rutten, UMCD commander. “The team’s dedication to safety and our complex mission remains high as we work to reduce storage risk to the public.”

“This was a superb and spirited team effort,” said Don Barclay, Army site project manager. “Our dedicated storage and disposal work force overcame rocket fires and many other technical challenges to safely reach this milestone. We look forward to the next munitions campaign in this continuous process.”

Umatilla storage and disposal workers are gearing up to process the last GB munitions—nearly 62,000 8-inch and 155mm GB projectiles. A changeover of plant equipment and procedures for 8-inch GB projectiles disposal will take about seven weeks. All GB munitions should be destroyed by mid-2007, followed by VX agent munitions changeover and disposal. VX-filled M55 rockets will be the first munition to be destroyed in that campaign. After destruction of all VX munitions, the depot will dispose of mustard agent stored in bulk containers.

“We’re fulfilling a commitment to get rid of these weapons safely and in an environmentally responsible manner,” said Doug Hamrick, Washington Group International’s project general manager for UMCDF. “Our work force is justifiably proud of safely completing the GB rocket campaign.”

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Chemical munitions disposal at the plant is a continuous process. Preparations for the changeover from GB rockets to GB projectiles began as soon as the MC-1 750-pound GB bomb campaign was completed in early June. The Munitions Processing Bay (MPB), which is not used during rocket processing, was decontaminated to allow workers to begin preparing the components needed for projectile processing while wearing a reduced level of protective clothing. Now that rocket processing is completed, changeover work also can proceed in the facility's two Explosive Containment Rooms (ECRs).

While rockets are punched and drained, then sheared into pieces for incineration, projectiles must be disassembled during processing. Projectile processing utilizes all three types of furnaces at the facility, while rocket processing involved only two types of furnaces.

“There's much more mechanical equipment associated with projectiles disposal than with rockets. Projectile campaign challenges will be met by the project staff with the same diligence and dedication we had during rocket destruction. Safe and compliant destruction of the GB projectiles will now be the primary focus of the project,” Hamrick said.

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