



PRESS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CHEMICAL MATERIALS AGENCY

Umatilla Chemical Depot

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Depot detects traces of mustard chemical agent vapor during routine storage area monitoring

UMATILLA CHEMICAL DEPOT, Hermiston, Ore. – Depot chemical operations monitoring workers detected trace amounts of HD mustard chemical agent vapor today inside a depot storage structure or “igloo” that houses bulk containers. The traces of mustard chemical agent vapor were detected during routine weekly monitoring. The vapor is likely due to a leaking bulk container.

There was no danger to the public or environment. The igloos have a passive filtration system that prevents chemical agent vapor from escaping outside the structures. As a further protective measure after each leak is discovered, a powered filtration system was installed on the igloo. The leaking container will be identified, inspected, repaired as necessary, and decontaminated.

Mustard is a blister agent that freezes below 59 degrees Fahrenheit and is thawed above that temperature. As aging mustard bulk containers thaw out while they are pre-warmed inside the igloo in preparation for disposal, or in warmer months of the year, they can leak. Those leaks are typically first discovered when depot monitoring workers routinely check for agent vapors from outside the igloo.

Mustard agent is a colorless to light yellow to dark brown oily liquid, depending upon the age and relative purity of the material. It has the odor of garlic or horseradish and its vapor is approximately 5.5 times heavier than air. Although mustard does not readily evaporate, it may pose both a liquid contact hazard and a vapor hazard to the eyes, skin or respiratory tract. The only type of mustard munition stored at the Umatilla Chemical Depot is bulk containers or “ton containers.” Those munitions have no explosive components.

Depot officials routinely notify the public when such incidents occur. Army officials also notify off-post emergency operations centers in Umatilla and Morrow counties, Ore.; Benton County, Wash.; those in Oregon and Washington states; the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation; and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

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