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News Release

For Information: Don Kennedy, 410-436-7118 22 October 2012

U.S. Army supports chemical remediation effort at Dover Air Force Base

DOVER AIR FORCE BASE, Del. – The Chemical Biological Application and Risk Reduction (CBARR) Business Unit of the U.S. Army Edgewood Chemical Biological Center (ECBC) supported a three-week chemical remediation effort at Dover Air Force Base that safely destroyed three recovered chemical munitions containing mustard agent.

The project began at the end of September and included 10 CBARR crew members, five from the Edgewood Area of Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md. and five from Pine Bluff Arsenal, Ark. The team sported high visibility gear that included long-sleeve neon shirts and khaki pants as a required precautionary safety measure for projects involving the decontamination of chemical weapons.

“We’ve done the same items in Dover before but the one thing that’s unique this time is we have a ‘leaker,’ so to speak. What that means is the munition’s integrity is suspect and may actually be leaking,” explained Ray Diberardo, Dover project manager for CBARR.

The recovered chemical warfare materiel (RCWM) was found among assembly line workers at a Sea Watch International clam processing plant in Milford, Del. a few months ago, and the U.S. Army’s 20th Support Command confirmed the munitions had tested positive for the presence of a chemical agent. CBARR is now working with the U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency and the Project Manager for Non-Stockpile Chemical Materiel (PMNSCM) to safely destroy three 75-millimeter munitions filled with mustard using CMA’s Explosive Destruction System (EDS).

This marks the seventh time CBARR has been called in to support the remediation effort at Dover Air Force Base, which began in 2004 when the EDS safely destroyed 11 World War I-era 75-millimeter projectiles.

The CMA EDS is an explosion and vapor containment chamber in which the munition is placed for destruction. However, unlike open detonation, which uses explosives to destroy the chemical agent, the EDS instead uses explosives to access the contents of the munition, expose the chemical agent and destroy the burster. Chemicals are then added to the chamber to neutralize the munition’s fill of chemical agent.

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There were a few atypical things that Diberardo noted about the Dover remediation project, such as legacy waste that included contaminated personnel protective equipment (PPE) from the Sea Watch recovery operation, vermiculite, plastic wrap and other items that were found near the munitions.

“In the past we’ve never had this legacy waste. It’s unique for the operation but it’s not unique for what the crew is trained for. It’s really nothing out of the ordinary,” said Diberardo. “We also monitored some conventional items that ended up being in close proximity to the chemical items.”

According to Jim Swank, chemical operations manager for CBARR, conventional items like rifle grenades, hand grenades, 57mm projectiles and a few small arms were monitored to determine whether they were clean or contaminated. These conventional items, along with the legacy waste, is what made the Dover project unique for Diberardo and the CBARR crew. Within weeks, the open field had transformed into a bustling operation center equipped with mobile labs, analytic platforms, generators and tents. CMA PMNSCM has successfully and safely destroyed more than 1,800 items over the lifetime of the EDS equipment.

“We have a lot of equipment for these kinds of field situations. CBARR integrates equipment with CMA in order to meet all the requirements of the site,” said Diberardo.

“We also bring a highly experienced workforce. The crew does this for a living and there’s a lot of commonality between the various jobs so we can pick someone from Pine Bluff and know they’re going to be as fluent in the job as someone from Edgewood. It’s a very experienced workforce and that’s our biggest asset right now.”

Photo credit: U.S. Army Edgewood Chemical Biological Center
IMG_26 – Members of the Chemical Biological Application and Risk Reduction (CBARR) Business Unit prepare the Explosive Destruction System (EDS) to safely destroy recovered chemical muntions.

IMG_44 – A CBARR EDS operator secures a chemical munition during an operation at Dover Air Force Base in September.

For more information about ECBC, visit http://www.ecbc.army.mil/.

ECBC is the Army’s principal research and development center for chemical and biological defense technology, engineering and field operations. ECBC has achieved major technological advances for the warfighter and for our national defense, with a long and distinguished history of providing the Armed Forces with quality systems and outstanding customer service. ECBC is a U.S. Army Research, Development and Engineering Command laboratory located at the Edgewood Area of Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. For more information about the Edgewood Chemical Biological Center, please visit our website at http://www.ecbc.army.mil or call (410) 436-7118.

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