

Chemical waste cleanup proposed at Fort Detrick

By David Dishneau
AP Writer

Frederick, MD – Army officials and environmental regulators on Monday outlined a \$4.9 million plan for excavating and burning nearly 815v tons of material from a chemical waste dump at Fort Detrick.

The four month project would resolve the most pressing environmental problem at the installation, where industrial solvents buried decades ago are believed to be the source of groundwater contamination that has tainted at least three private wells and a spring.

Work could begin in January or February, pending approval by the Army Medical Command after a public comment period that ends June 15, said Col. Jeffery Springer of Detrick's environment and safety directorate. A public meeting on the plan is set for June 1.

"The bottom line is to do this as quickly as possible to prevent further migration of the contaminants into the groundwater," Springer said.

The plan, which Detrick officials preffer over two other options, would involve freezing the soil around and beneath the site to 20 degrees to contain any spills from drums or containers broken during excavation, Springer said. Pipes filled with refrigerant would be installed underground to freeze the soil.

He said the plan—developed by the Army, the Maryland Department of the Environment and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency—would provide more protection while the material is excavated than either of the alternatives: A \$5.7 million plan involving a cement-like grout barrier and a \$4.7 million plan using a barrier of steel plates.

The Army prefers the frozen soil barrier because it can be easily monitored for problems.

After excavation, the material would be separated, identified and transported to a permitted, off-site incinerator for disposal in accordance with environmental regulations.

The Army began detecting industrial solvents tetrachloroethylene (PCE) and trichloroethylene (TCE) in test wells on post in 1991. PCE is a suspected human carcinogen, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. TCE is suspected of causing tumors in laboratory animals in high doses. Both chemicals have been found in the groundwater in concentrations far exceeding the government's recommended safety levels.

Three nearby homes with well water that contained the chemicals were connected to city water at Army expense in 1992. The Army connected four other homes to city water as a precaution.

The work will be covered by \$28 million the Army recently allocated for environmental projects at Detrick over the next four years. Springer said that the other projects are: Purifying the contaminated ground water, cleaning up another area of less severe TCE contamination, ad cleaning up heavy metals at the site of an incenerator that has been torn down.