

## Awaiting word on Plan B

\$12.5 million more needed for cleanup at Fort Detrick site

by Nicole Belanger  
Staff Writer



Tom Fedor/The Gazette

A white tent covers Fort Detrick's Area B, which sits near Stonegate Farms just beyond Shookstown Road. In the 1940s and '50s, Army personnel buried toxic chemicals in metal containers, which have since leaked, contaminating groundwater.

Fort Detrick officials are still waiting to hear whether they will receive an additional \$12.5 million from the Pentagon to continue cleanup efforts at Area B, where decades-old toxins have leaked into groundwater.

The request, which went through the Army Medical Center, was sent out in May, said Lt. Col. Jeff Springer, who is working on the project.

When the cleanup project began in February, officials expected to spend \$4.5 million, but after workers began unearthing the chemicals, they realized that the contaminated soil was in a larger area than expected.

Now Springer expects the project, which should be finished in December 2002, to cost close to \$17 million.

In 1992, Area B—near Kemp Lane and Shookstown Road—was found to be the source of contamination in nearby residents' drinking water. In the 1940s and '50s, Army personnel buried chemicals, including cancer-causing trichloroethene, in metal containers, which have since leaked.

Springer said he is hopeful that the additional money will come now, since a delay could mean the project would be even more costly, he said.

The money would have to be reallocated from other environmental restoration projects that are funded through the Pentagon.

No decision has been made.

Springer and members of the Restoration Advisory Board were to discuss the cleanup effort at their bi-monthly meeting Wednesday night, which occurred after press time.

They also plan to schedule a September meeting, where members of the press, local dignitaries and the 13 Restoration Advisory Board members will visit the area, which is covered under a large white tent, Springer said.

The tent provides air filtration, which takes dust and any odors out before returning it outside.

"We want to show the public what we're doing. We think we're doing some very innovative steps to protect public health," Springer said. "We want the public to have confidence in what Detrick is doing and in its environmental program."

Fort Detrick personnel are also working with representatives from the state Department of the Environment, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers to develop a way to take chemicals out of the drinking water.

Springer believes the group has identified a chemical that may react with contaminants to create saltwater and heat byproducts. "Tests show that this can eliminate in excess of 90 percent of contaminants," he said.

Dennis Orenshaw, project manager with the Environmental Protection Agency, said he is satisfied with the cleanup efforts that have been under way at the Army base. "I really can't think of anything that they should be doing differently," he said.

The federal agency became involved in the project more than a year ago when the top brass at Fort Detrick asked for help.

"We go down periodically as needed and meet on a monthly basis," Orenshaw said.

The agency has been involved in numerous cleanups of contaminated areas as a result of improper disposal years ago.