



No. 715-00

(703)695-0192(media)

IMMEDIATE RELEASE November 30, 2000 (703)697-5737(public/industry)

CHEMICAL WEAPONS DESTRUCTION COMPLETE ON JOHNSTON ATOLL

Today, the U.S. Army took a major step in safely eliminating the U.S. chemical weapons stockpile by demilitarizing the last of the chemical munitions stockpiled on Johnston Atoll in the Pacific.

The operators of the Johnston Atoll Chemical Agent Disposal System (JACADS) completed destruction on Nov. 29 of more than 13,000 land mines that were filled with nerve agent VX. These land mines were the last of the chemical munitions stored on Johnston Atoll to be destroyed. The facility, located 825 miles southwest of Hawaii, is the nation's first fully integrated facility designed specifically for the disposal of chemical weapons.

"The soldiers and contractors who have safely destroyed the chemical weapons on Johnston Island should be extremely proud of their accomplishment," said Army Lt. Gen. Paul Kern, military deputy to the assistant secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology. "This is an historical event which will improve the security of the United States and provide hope for the rest of the world that the 21st century will be safer for our children and grandchildren."

"Completion of the VX land mine campaign, the last of the Johnston Island chemical weapons stockpile, paves the way for the Army to close its doors at JACADS," said James Bacon, the Army's program manager for Chemical Demilitarization (PMCD). "JACADS is a model of safe and successful operations for the Army's eight other disposal sites, as well as for other countries that are looking to safely destroy their stockpiles of chemical weapons."

"Over the past 10 years, JACADS has safely destroyed more than 400,000 rockets, projectiles, bombs, mortars, ton containers, and mines," said JACADS Project Manager

Gary McCloskey. "JACADS also has destroyed more than 2,000 tons of chemical agent in the form of nerve agent (GB, also known as Sarin, and VX) and blister agent (HD). Our 100 percent destruction of Johnston Island's stockpile adds up to six percent of the nation's original total stockpile."

During the JACADS disposal campaigns, the Army tracked the process to continuously improve and enhance safety for workers, the community, and the environment. This knowledge and experience is being applied to the Army's other disposal facilities to ensure that safe destruction of chemical weapons continues. The Army also will share information with other countries that are researching technologies to destroy their chemical weapons stockpiles.

Washington Demilitarization Co., formerly the Raytheon Demilitarization Co., has been involved in JACADS since its inception, and has provided the design support, equipment procurement and installation, acceptance testing, and operations and maintenance of the facility.

"We have been looking forward to this day since JACADS started operating in June 1990," said Robert Love Jr., vice president for Washington Demilitarization Co. and JACADS program director. "I am proud to be a member of the team that is doing its part in safely ridding our country and the world of chemical weapons."

Working in cooperation with several federal oversight agencies, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region IX and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, PMCD is now preparing to close JACADS. Part of the process leading to closure will include disposing of secondary waste that was produced during disposal operations. In addition, Chemical Agent Identification Sets that were shipped from Guam remain to be destroyed. The Army is currently working with the EPA to refine the procedures for safe and environmentally sound destruction of these sets. Closure is scheduled to take up to 33 months.

VX land mines were manufactured in the late 1950s and early 1960s and were designed to disperse lethal agent upon detonation. They are filled with VX nerve agent, a clear, odorless and tasteless liquid that affects the nervous system. More than 100,000 VX landmines were manufactured in the United States and 13,302 were stored on Johnston Island.

Since 1971, the commander U.S. Army, Pacific (USARPAC) has been charged with the mission of safely storing these munitions. For almost 30 years, USARPAC provided soldiers who spent yearlong tours on this small island, away from their families, to ensure that the weapons were safely stored until they were destroyed. This long, dedicated and successful service is a testimony to the professionalism of thousands of USARPAC soldiers of several generations.

Construction of JACADS began in 1985 after years of research into safe destruction

procedures. Operations began in 1990. Former and present USARPAC commanders and U.S. Army program managers for Chemical Demilitarization have worked together closely to complete the mission safely and efficiently.

PMCD plans to commemorate the end of successful disposal operations at JACADS with a series of events scheduled for next year, culminating in a ceremony on Johnston Island in the fall of 2001.

