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Army agrees to pay more for cleanup

The Boston Globe

By Davis Bushnell, Globe Correspondent | July 14, 2005

The removal of more than 3,700 barrels of depleted uranium from Starmet Corp.'s Superfund site in West Concord will begin by late summer, according to the state Department of Environmental Protection, which was notified this week that the US Army will pay an additional \$3.1 million to rid the property of this material.

The department, spokesman Joseph Ferson said, is working out contractual details with Salt Lake City-based Envirocare of Utah Inc., which, he noted, has handled a number of similar projects in Colorado and Utah.

It's expected that an agreement will be ironed out within two weeks, after which Envirocare will go on-site, take an inventory of the barrels and then prepare a timetable for removing and disposing of them, Ferson said. He said the project will probably be completed in six months.

The long-awaited announcement was hailed by environmental officials and Concord activists as a giant step toward getting a handle on the property's overall contamination.

The project, which is critical to the cleanup of the 46-acre property off Route 62, has been delayed since March over the cost of removing and disposing of the barrels containing low levels of radioactive material. They are stored in Starmet buildings.

Bids submitted three months ago by Envirocare and another, unnamed, out-of-state contractor exceeded the original cost estimate of \$5.2 million by \$3.1 million. That prompted the environmental protection department to ask the Army last month to pick up the revised tab of \$8.3 million.

The Army then agreed in a letter from the Justice Department.

In April 2004, the Army had signed an agreement with the environmental department and the state attorney general's office to pay for the removal of the barrels filled with depleted uranium.

From 1970 to 1999, Starmet's predecessor company, Nuclear Metals Inc., made uranium-tipped bullets for the Army.

Because the barrels of depleted uranium continue to be guarded 24 hours a day, they don't constitute a present danger, according to state officials and other environmental specialists.

The announcement that the barrel-removal process will get going soon elicited positive responses from the project manager of the company conducting a remedial investigation of the Starmet property and from a Concord activist group leader.

Envirocare offers an excellent "disposal option for mixed waste, and we'll undoubtedly be meeting with company officials when they tour the [Starmet] site for the first time," said Bruce Thompson of Windsor, Conn.-based De Maximis Inc., which has been evaluating air and ground-water data from the Starmet site.

De Maximis is conducting its investigations for the Army and four other parties cited in 2003 by the US Environmental Protection Agency for contaminating the property, which went on the list of the agency's most polluted sites nationwide in June 2001.

In addition to the Army, the others found to be responsible by the EPA for the Starmet property's contamination are: the US Department of Energy; Whittaker Corp. of Simi Valley, Calif.; Textron Inc. of Providence; and MONY Life Insurance Co. of New York City. ■

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