



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**

Norfolk District

803 Front Street
Norfolk, Virginia 23510-1096
Phone: 757-201-7606 (Public Affairs Office)
Web site: www.armyengineersnorfolk.com

Topic: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers begins munitions response work at Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge, Poquoson, VA

WHAT:

Beginning 12 Jan. 09, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) will conduct Remedial Investigation (RI) work at Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge, a Formerly Used Defense Site (FUDS) property. The work of the RI team will characterize the nature and extent of munitions and explosives of concern as well as munitions constituents at the Refuge.

- Munitions and explosives of concern or MEC refer to past military munitions, which either malfunctioned or were discarded.
- Munitions constituents (MC) are those chemical contaminants associated with MEC that may have entered into the soil, sediment or water and pose an environmental concern.
- USACE and their contractor, Shaw Environmental, Inc., will conduct the RI field work in two phases over two years to avoid bird nesting season:
- **January to April 2009:** Shoreline clearance and collection of geophysical information (sub-surface metal detecting). The shoreline clearance will remove MEC that pose a safety concern for the RI team's access to the Refuge, as well as allow the team to determine the type and extent of MEC present along the shore.
- **January to April 2010:** Surveying selected areas to determine where MEC items are present in the subsurface and collecting environmental samples to determine if chemical contaminants have entered the environment.
- Once these two phases of Remedial Investigation fieldwork are completed, the data collected by the team is compiled and evaluated as part of the RI process to provide a clear picture of the nature and extent of munitions-related contamination present on the Refuge.

HOW:

When conducting this RI fieldwork, the team will encounter munitions and explosives of concern that will require disposal. This typically consists of an intentional detonation of the item in-place, in a controlled manner. Prior to any detonation, USACE and its contractor will coordinate with the appropriate federal, state and local agencies. Restricted areas will be established and enforced for a short duration to ensure public safety, and local residents notified of occasional explosions.

WHY:

Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge, formerly known as Plum Tree Island Range, was used for aerial bombing and gunnery practice from 1917 through the late 1950s. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acquired the range in 1972. The Refuge is being addressed under the Formerly Used Defense Site (FUDS) program, conducted by USACE under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), commonly known as Superfund. USACE's Baltimore District has project management authority for all FUDS properties in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

PUBLIC SAFETY:

If you or anyone you know should find a suspicious item or possible munitions, remember they can be very dangerous. Military munitions are designed to withstand long periods of storage under varied and often unfavorable conditions. Depending on climate and soil conditions, the item may look brand new or rusty and deteriorated. Regardless of how an item looks, these munitions can explode if handled.

Never assume an ordnance item is safe to touch. Even the least sensitive items and those referred to as "practice" items may explode if exposed to careless and improper handling. Leave the ordnance handling to professionals. It takes trained experts to assess the situation and to remove any explosive hazard. In the event you come across suspected munitions, follow the three Rs:

1. **RECOGNIZE** – If you find a suspicious item or possible munitions, do not touch, kick or do anything to disturb the time. Also, remember that munitions found in the water or marsh can be difficult to identify and may appear to be any other metallic or rusty item. Use caution, leave it alone and do not touch it.
2. **RETREAT** – If you know or suspect that you are near munitions, mark the area with a small item such as a hat or pen, and immediately walk away on the same path you came in on. Do not run.
3. **REPORT** – Remember the location of the suspicious item and call 911.

BACKGROUND/HISTORY

- Plum Tree Island Range consists of approximately 3,276 acres, located near Poquoson, Va., in the Chesapeake Bay. This property is known or suspected to contain military munitions and explosives of concern (e.g., unexploded ordnance) and therefore may present an explosive hazard.
- The former range is now a part of the Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge, owned by the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and remains undeveloped with no public access permitted.
- Purchased by the War Department in 1917 and remained under military control until 1972, when the U.S. Air Force transferred the property to the Department of the Interior.
- The former range was used for aerial bombardment and gunnery practice from 1917 to the late 1950s.
- A surface clearance of the site was conducted in 1959, but due to the marshy conditions, most of the ordnance could not be recovered.

For More Information: For more information on RI fieldwork at Plum Tree Island, contact the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: Gerald Rogers, Norfolk District Public Affairs Office, at (757)-201-7241 or Joyce Conant, Baltimore District Public Affairs Office, at (410) 962-2809.