



US Army Corps  
of Engineers®  
Baltimore District

# PLUM TREE ISLAND

## Fact Sheet

PLUM TREE ISLAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

October 2009

### U.S. Army Corps Begins Munitions Response Work at Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge

As part of continuing activities by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on the Formerly Used Defense Site (FUDS) at Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge), Remedial Investigation (RI) work is continuing to address munitions remaining as a result of past military training activities. The focus of this work is to characterize the nature and extent of munitions and explosives of concern (MEC) and munitions constituents (MC) at the Refuge. MEC refers to military munitions that were used and did not function as designed, or were discarded. These residual MEC still pose an explosive hazard. MC refers to 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., are conducting the second of two investigation phases beginning in October 2009. The investigations are intended to identify the nature and extent of munitions-related contamination so that decisions regarding cleanup can be made.

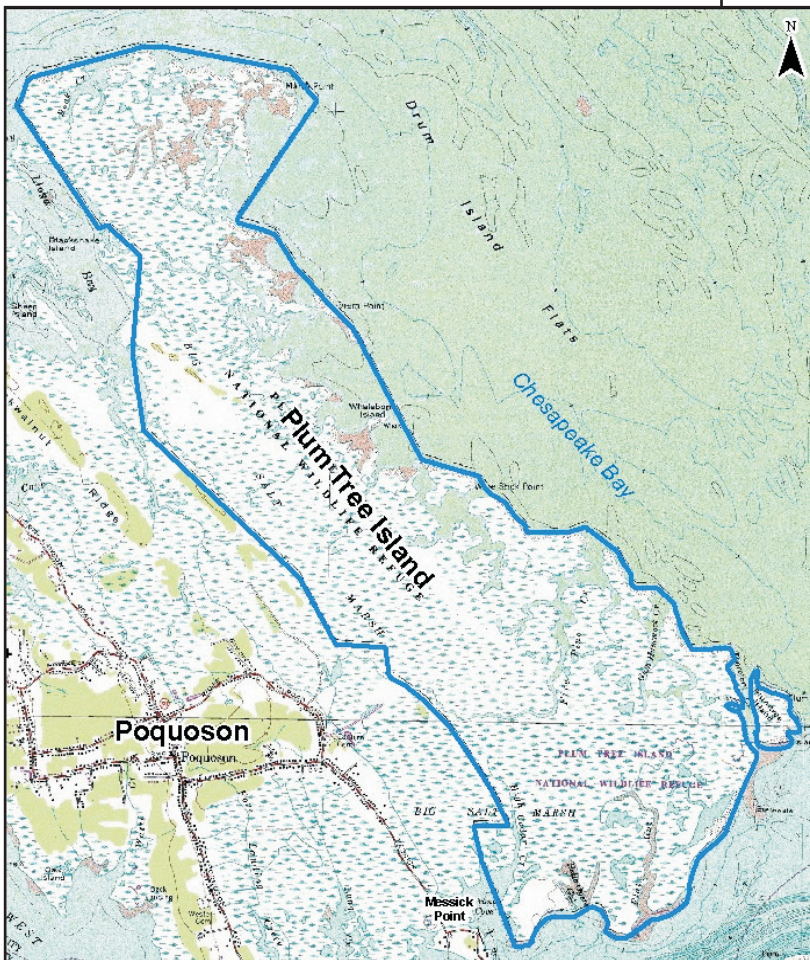
The first phase of field work was conducted from January through March 2009 and consisted of a shoreline clearance and a geophysical investigation (sub-surface metal detecting). The shoreline clearance addressed the southern shoreline to remove MEC exposed at the surface that posed an immediate safety concern for the RI teams accessing the Refuge. Geophysical investigations were conducted within the interior of the northern

portion of the site to determine whether that area had been used during past bombing range training. MEC in the form of World War I bombs were found in the subsurface.

The second phase of work will be conducted from October 2009 through April 2010, and will consist of surveying the southern portion of the site where bombing is believed to have been greatest, and collecting environmental samples to determine if chemical contaminants or MC have entered the environment.

Once these two phases of RI field work are complete, the collected data will be 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 and the risk to human health and the environment that it may pose. This information will then be used in a Feasibility Study to identify steps that can be taken to address any potential hazards identified during this work.

When conducting this RI field work, MEC will be encountered that will require disposal. This typically consists of an intentional detonation of the item in-place, in a controlled manner. When this occurs, the USACE and its contractor will coordinate with the appropriate federal, state, and local agencies. Restricted areas will be established and enforced for short time periods to ensure public safety, and the community may occasionally hear explosions.



## Why is this necessary?

Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge was formerly known as the Plum Tree Island Range and used for aerial bombing and gunnery practice from 1917 through the late 1950s. The former bombing range was acquired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1972. With the exception of waterfowl hunting by permit on Cow Island, the entire refuge remains closed to all public use due to the potential for encountering unexploded ordnance (UXO). Known extensive usage of the southern portion of the Refuge for bombing and the presence of UXO along the shoreline has prompted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to establish a Danger Zone in the shallow water along the southern half of the Refuge. This Danger Zone is marked by warning signs, and disturbance of the bottom is prohibited.

The former bombing range is being addressed under the Formerly Used Defense Sites (FUDS) program conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The FUDS program refers to the environmental restoration of properties once owned or used by the U.S. Government and used by the Department of Defense. These properties can include former ammunition plants and various types of military training properties such as bombing and gunnery ranges, small arms ranges, and training and maneuver areas. As of January 2008, the USACE Baltimore District assumed project management activities for all FUDS properties in the Norfolk area.



## What to do if you find a munition or suspicious item

If you or anyone you know should find a suspicious item or possible munition, 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 the professionals. It takes trained experts to assess the situation and to remove any explosive hazard.



### Follow the 3 Rs:

1. **RECOGNIZE** - If you find a suspicious item or possible munition, do not touch, kick, or do anything to disturb the item. 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 a munition, 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.



## Community Information

The community will be kept informed of progress of the munitions response activities by using a variety of methods such as fact sheets, mailings, public meetings, and media updates.

Point of contact information for the Baltimore District is provided below.

### Point of Contact:

Attn: Mr. Clem Gaines, Public Affairs Office  
 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District  
 P.O. Box 1715, Baltimore, MD 21203  
 Phone: 410-962-2809  
 E-mail: Clemens.W.Gaines@usace.army.mil

or Attn: Mr. Gerald Rogers, Public Affairs Office  
 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Norfolk District  
 803 Front Street, Norfolk, VA 23510  
 Phone: 757-201-7241  
 E-mail: Gerald.Rogers@usace.army.mil