

Last VX Nerve Agent in CMA Stockpile Destroyed

By Mr. Greg Mahall

The U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency (CMA) completed the destruction of all VX nerve agent munitions at U.S. chemical weapons destruction sites on 24 December 2008. This milestone was reached when the last land mine containing VX was destroyed at the Anniston Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (ANCDF), Anniston, Alabama.

CMA personnel and contractors previously destroyed VX nerve agent munitions at five other disposal sites: Umatilla Chemical Depot, Oregon; Newport Chemical Depot, Indiana; Pine Bluff Chemical Activity, Arkansas; Deseret Chemical Depot, Utah; and Johnston Atoll Chemical Agent Disposal System, about 800 miles southwest of Hawaii. The only nerve agent remaining for CMA to destroy is tabun (GA), located at the Deseret Chemical Depot.

The ANCDF site project manager, Mr. Timothy K. Garrett, declared, "We have reached a truly remarkable milestone following more than five years of deliberate, but careful, operations. All nerve agent munitions—those containing GB [sarin] and those containing VX—have been safely processed."

"The elimination of the deadly chemical agent from each site's stockpile is a relief to the stockpile communities and a sign of our commitment to other nations as we move one step closer to a safer world," said the director of the CMA, Mr. Conrad Whyne. "I commend Anniston and all CMA destruction sites on this extraordinary achievement. By destroying the VX agent at each of CMA's destruction sites, you have made the world a much safer place," he said.

The CMA continues to safely and securely store the remaining VX in the U.S. chemical weapons stockpile located at the Blue Grass Chemical Activity, Kentucky. A separate Department of Defense organization—the U.S. Army Element, Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternatives—is charged with its destruction. A neutralization facility is under construction at that site.

VX was originally developed in the early 1950s; all of the Nation's stockpiled VX (about 4,400 tons) was originally produced at the Newport Chemical Depot between 1961 and 1969. VX is the least volatile, but most potent, of all chemical warfare agents. Its effects are similar to those of pesticides—it attacks the nervous system, causing muscles to convulse

uncontrollably. Exposure can result in convulsions, paralysis, loss of consciousness, respiratory failure, and death. The United States never used VX in combat, and the Newport production facility was destroyed in 2006.

The destruction of chemical weapons is complete at the Newport Chemical Depot; Johnston Atoll Chemical Agent Disposal System; and Edgewood Chemical Activity, Maryland. The CMA is destroying or preparing to destroy blister agents at the ANCDF, Umatilla Chemical Depot, Pine Bluff Chemical Activity, and Deseret Chemical Depot. Chemical agent munitions continue to be safely stored at the Blue Grass Chemical Activity and at the Pueblo Chemical Depot, Colorado.

Additional information about the elimination of VX nerve agent munitions can be found at <http://www.cma.army.mil/endofvx.aspx>.

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Munitions handlers display markings on the last M23 VX land mine, denoting the end of nerve agent munitions processing at the ANCDF and the end of VX destruction for the CMA.