

Pact signed to clean up McGuire hazardous-waste site

**By Edward Colimore
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A 3,500-acre hazardous-waste site at McGuire Air Force Base in Burlington County will be cleaned up under an agreement signed this week between the Air Force and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the EPA said yesterday.

The agreement calls for the removal of nickel, mercury, PCBs, and other contaminants at the McGuire Air Force Base Superfund Site in New Hanover Township, the agency said.

It "is a significant milestone that will benefit the people of New Jersey and the environment," said George Pavlou, acting EPA regional administrator. "The agreement shows that EPA and the Air Force are in accord on a way to move forward to clean up the site."

A time frame for completion of the work and cost estimates have not been determined, said Elias Rodriguez, an EPA spokesman at the agency's office in New York City.

"We are optimistic that the agreement will serve to streamline the cleanup process and ensure effective site cleanup that is protective of human health and the environment," McGuire spokeswoman Angel Lopez said yesterday.

The Burlington County site borders Fort Dix and Wrightstown, and is within the boundaries of the Pinelands National Reserve, an area of federal land designated for ecosystem protection.

It was called Rudd Field in 1937 and was operated by the Army Air Corps at Fort Dix. The dirt-strip runway was flanked by a few maintenance and administrative buildings.

By 1948, the location was taken over by the Air Force and officially designated McGuire Air Force Base. Later found to be contaminated, it was included on the EPA's National Priorities List of the most hazardous waste sites on Oct. 22, 1999.

Evidence of nickel and mercury was discovered in water and sediment samples collected from wetlands downstream from the location.

Other contaminants, including PCBs, hazardous inorganic substances, and volatile organic compounds, also were found in the soil, and in surface water and groundwater.

Cleaning up the waste is the aim of the agreement between the EPA and Air Force. It establishes a schedule for developing, implementing, and monitoring the work, which the EPA will oversee.

The public can offer views on the agreement until Nov. 2 by sending written comments to Paul G. Ingrisano, Remedial Project Manager, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 290 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10007-1866.

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