



Restoration Advisory Board

The Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) monitors base cleanup of the El Toro base. Several volunteers are actively participating in the oversight process. The public is invited to RAB meetings. This letter, to the Fullerton Observer, was written by a Fullerton volunteer on the board, to attract attention to issues being grappled with by the RAB.

Date: May 29, 2000

Re: An Update on Critical Issues for the El Toro Base Closure

To: The Fullerton Observer

From: Dr. Chuck Bennett, Chair, Technical Subcommittee. Restoration Advisory Board for the Former MCAS at El Toro

With the March 7 overwhelming vote in favor of Measure F, you might properly expect that the controversy at the El Toro Marine Corp Air Station (El Toro) was settled. If you did, you would be way off. It is true that the prospects that MCAS El Toro would become an international airport have dimmed substantially as a result of Measure F passage.

Five decades of military operation have certainly had its impact on the environment at El Toro. Over 400 underground storage tanks that do not meet the 1998 Federal guidelines for storage use must be taken care of, which means either removed or closed in place. Four recognized landfills are due to be capped, and various spill areas are being cleaned up. There is a 3.5 mile plume of the principal water aquifer that is contaminated by the Department of Navy's (DoN) chlorinated solvents (mainly TCE and PCE, which should be familiar to those in Fullerton concerned about our own Old Hughes property and its chlorinated solvent plume) for which a remedy is close to agreement among the stakeholders. It will take years to clean up or take care of the messes that the DoN sprinkled over 4500 acres of prime Orange County land. It may be prime land, but it sure isn't pristine land! The DoN has made it clear that they have no intention of returning pristine land to the County. They will clean up the 4500 acres only to the levels that the Regulatory Agencies require.

The Restoration Advisory Board is a collection of interested members of the public (e.g. a Lake Forest City Councilor, residents from Leisure World) and interested organizations (e.g. the City of Irvine, and the Irvine Ranch Water District). The RAB has bimonthly public meetings that are conducted by DoN personnel and supported by the oversight Regulatory Agencies. The next RAB meeting is Weds, 31 May 00, in Room L102 at Irvine City Hall, beginning at 6:30 pm. I encourage anyone with any interest in the El Toro Base closure to attend. Several interesting and important topics are on the agenda for this RAB meeting:

Topic One - The DoN consultants just released an important report about radionuclides in the groundwater at El Toro near the four landfills and Site 1 (the EOD, or the Explosives Ordnance

Disposal area). The consultants conclude that the only radionuclide of importance present was Uranium of natural origin. If it is of natural origin the DoN has no obligation to remediate the Uranium. But the DoN has a bit of a problem, the Uranium they found in Site 1 has too much Uranium 235 in it (N.B. it is the U235 in Uranium that makes nuclear power plants work and splits when an atom bomb explodes). The amount of U235 in the Site 1 samples is more than twice as much as you would find in natural uranium, and several outside experts have confirmed that the Site 1 results demonstrate enriched uranium. If it is enriched, it is man made and not natural. If it is not natural, the DoN will become liable for remediating all the Uranium. If it is shown to be enriched Uranium at the base, don't bother to ask me how it got there. Ask the DoN.

Topic Two - The DoN records show that one of the landfills (IRP Site 2) had a different, and larger, defined boundary as late as 1997. A dangling "Tail" of this old landfill boundary went outside the boundary of the base. The DoN reports also found buried waste in this "Tail". The main problem is that the County is planning to build a road extension right on top of this "Tail" which may contain DoN waste.

Topic Three - A Chlorinated Solvents Report commissioned by the City of Irvine estimates that up to 700,000 pounds of chlorinated solvent leaked out of the 26 miles of sewer pipe under the base. The DoN estimates that they lost only 8000 pounds of chlorinated solvents, which became the 3.5-mile plume. How would you like to be the Developer/Contractor at El Toro who found the missing 692,000 pounds of chlorinated solvent with your backhoe?

The RAB members anticipate getting some answers to these questions on Weds. All members of the public are welcome to attend. If you have any interest at all in the future of El Toro, please plan to attend the Public RAB Meeting on 31 May in Irvine.

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