The Aberdeen Three: Two Decades Later

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Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)  
Prescribed by ANSI Std Z39-18
Sulfuric Acid leak

September 17, 1985
To the Gunpowder River
Sulfuric Acid leak → Fish kill
Sulfuric Acid leak → Fish kill → Response by APG
Clean Up Personnel
Sulfuric Acid leak → Fish kill → Response by APG
Clean Up Personnel

“a virtual ‘Pandora’s Box’
of potential sources of contamination…”
Sulfuric Acid leak → Fish kill → Response by APG Clean Up Personnel

Baltimore Sun coverage

Disgruntled employee

“a virtual ‘Pandora’s Box’ of potential sources of contamination…”
Reports describe long list of dangers at Aberdeen plant

**Aberdeen, Md.** From Newsday

The Air Force reported more than 100 dangerous chemicals in its new weapons factory.

In a recent report, the Air Force listed 100 dangerous chemicals in its new weapons factory. This is the first time the Air Force has released such a list.

The report includes chemicals such as:

- **Cyanide**
- **Nitric Acid**
- **Cyanogen Chloride**
- **Sodium Nitrite**
- **Potassium Cyanide**

The report also includes chemicals that are not known to be hazardous, such as:

- **Carbon Tetrachloride**
- **Methyl Chloride**
- **Ethylene Oxide**

The report states that the chemicals are stored in tanks and不一定

The Air Force has been accused of covering up information about the chemicals.

**Unprotected workers**

In a recent report, the Air Force admitted that workers are exposed to dangerous chemicals. The report states that:

- **Workers are exposed to chemicals without proper protective clothing.**
- **Workers are exposed to chemicals in air without proper filters.**
- **Workers are exposed to chemicals in water without proper filtration.**

The report calls for immediate action to protect workers.

**Bad mixes**

In a recent report, the Air Force admitted that chemicals are mixed in a way that is dangerous. The report states that:

- **Chemicals are mixed in a way that could cause explosions.**
- **Chemicals are mixed in a way that could cause fires.**
- **Chemicals are mixed in a way that could cause chemical reactions.**

The report calls for immediate action to prevent accidents.
Reports find Aberdeen plant rife with danger

By Robert Benjamin
Sun Staff Correspondent

ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND — The U.S. Army has been conducting key research for the next generation of chemical weapons in a threat-simulating facility where a witch’s brew of unconsented, highly hazardous substances was often misunderstood, according to investigation by The Sun.

The Army instilled chemists at the research plant without required state registration and inspections. Undescribed chemicals were dumped into the building’s sewers. On at least one occasion, unprocessed workers were exposed to a toxic substance there. Hazardous chemicals were improperly stored at the plant — at times, in containers that could have produced lethal nerve agents.

In many cases, the chemical handling practices at the facility were in the past three years apparently breached state and federal environmental protection and worker safety laws at the key research facility — problems that Army officials largely knew about for at least several years, according to their own documents. And, the publications said, they began to feel that the Army had misled them.

"We were told that there were no real problems at the plant," said Barbara A. Babcock, a Maryland county councilwoman. "I’m not at all impressed with the way the Army has handled this. I don’t think they’ve been up-front with us."

"We’ve been quite concerned about the plant, and all we got from the Army was ‘no, nothing’s wrong there,’" said state Sen. Catherine J. Riley. "We tried to work with them, we bought what they said and we defended them. Now I don’t know what to do."

State Delegate Barbara G. Kremer, D-Murfreesboro, asked, "The Army has been very hard to get answers from. This is exactly the kind of thing that I’ve been warned about happening at Aberdeen. I do think there must have been some intentional misleading going on here."

Also responding yesterday to the disclosures in The Sun, U.S. Representative Helen Delich Bentley, R-2nd, said she will be meeting tomorrow at the proving ground with a member of the Army’s Chemical Research and Engineering Center, which runs the plant. Mrs. Bentley said she wants to know "the whole story."

General Klahn, who has not responded to The Sun’s disclosures, had been scheduled since last week to appear at last night’s Harford County Council meeting to discuss the plant."

Thought the general attended a

See ABERDEEN, 4E, Col. 1
Army admits plant faults at Aberdeen

Chemical weapons research will be moved from facility

By Robert Benjamin
Sun Staff Correspondent

ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND — The U.S. Army, apparently responding to The Sun's investigation of a failing chemical weapons research plant here, acknowledges problems at the plant for the first time yesterday, and announced that it will not reopen the facility — closed seven weeks ago — except possibly in special cases.

Research projects at the plant will be shifted to other Edgewood facilities or to commercial contractors off the base, Col. Francis M. Duren, deputy commander of the Army's Chemical Research, Development and Engineering Center (CRDEC), said at a hastily called press conference.

The colonel added that the Army might still use the building for research on a single, unspecified energetic project or in the case of an emergency situation.

The 45-year-old building, known as the pilot plant and located in the proving ground's Edgewood area, had been a key research site for the Army's new binary chemical weapons — weapons that are to go into production whenever this fall, marking the first time in 17 years that the United States will be making offensive chemical munitions.

Col. Francis M. Duren

Acknowledges problems

dumped into the plant's systems, which feed into the proving ground's areas.

"Closed on unscheduled, unannounced tests. In order to review chemical substances without being told of their potential danger,"

Duren called chemicals were often improperly stored — at times, in combinations that could have produced lethal nerve agents.

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THE ABERDEEN MESS

At the Army's chemical weapons lab, environmental laws took a beating. Now who takes the rap?

By Michael Weisskopf

Photographs by Steven Pumphrey

This pilot plant at the Aberdeen Proving Ground, the Army's weapons testing and development facility in northeastern Maryland, had been Carl Gep's domain since 1975. He loved it like a boy loves his basement workshop—as a place to tinker and to dream. Like Gep himself, his crew of engineers and technicians preferred overalls to suits, pipe wrenches to computers. Long ago, they had chosen the Army's chemical weapons program over the glittering world of private industry, and they were wedded to their reactors and distillation columns like prairie farmers to the land. When a filter needed to be changed or a pipe welded, they did it themselves. No need for outsiders. Amid the concrete floors and exposed beams of the Pilot Plant, they found a refuge from the "paper pushers" elsewhere at Aberdeen.

On the chilly afternoon of March 26, 1986, Gep called his crew together. Twenty workers filed into the Pilot Plant's little conference room as "the boss" stood just inside the doorway in front of them. He had an announcement.

"We're closed down," Gep said. "We're all moving out."

The crew groaned.

Of all the times to close the plant, why did it have to happen now? A 17-year ban on chemical weapons production had been lifted, and the crew felt like things were moving again. But the Pilot Plant had become the center of an environmental controversy, sparked by a memo from an Aberdeen environmental inspector calling it "a Pandora's box of potential sources of contamination." Gep told his men the Army brass had decided to temporarily shut down operations.

At first, Gep put up a strong front. He said he hoped they'd reopen and, anyway, someday they'd work together again. Then, as he recounted their years at the plant, the word "pride" tripped his composure. His voice cracked, and his eyes welled with tears.

It was the first time Gep had cried since his father died of cancer. The closing felt like losing a family—his work family. He didn't know what would happen to his crew. After 21 years at Aberdeen and at age 49, he didn't know exactly what was going to happen to him, either. Standing there, Gep thought it had to be the hardest day of his life. He was wrong. The hard times were only beginning.

Last week, Carl Gep and two of his superiors were called to trial in a Baltimore federal court—accused of violating federal environmental laws at his beloved Pilot Plant. Gep's two houses, William Ivey, 50, and Robert Lentz, 50, worked in offices miles from the plant, but like Gep, they have spent more than two decades in the Army's chemical weapons program. All
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Clean Up Personnel

Baltimore Sun coverage

Disgruntled employee

“a virtual ‘Pandora’s Box’ of potential sources of contamination…”

FBI Investigation
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FBI Investigation → Indictment → Trial
Trial begins for three APG managers

Formed Aberdeen general denies knowing of problems until news reports

The plant’s civilian manager, Carl E. Gepp, and his immediate superior, Robert H. Lentz and William C. Dee, are charged with four felony violations for allegedly storing and disposing of hazardous waste and with a misdemeanor water pol- 

Ground testified yesterday that he was not aware of possible environmental violations at an aging re- search plant until news reports prompted him to order an investigation.

Maj. Gen. James R. Kirkh, who served as commander of the Chemical Weapons Research and Development Center from 1984 to 1986, told a federal jury that the plant’s civilian managers assured him that hazardous chemicals were not being dumped illegally and that no laws had been broken.

By Karen E. Warmkessel

The general replied, “I believed what my supervisors were telling me.”

He said both Mr. Dee and Mr. Gepp assured him that chemicals were being disposed of in accordance with the law and Army regulations.

The general said the supervisors, who were responsible for ensuring that employees complied with the regulations,

During the month-long affair, former employees of the plant have testified that they dumped chemicals into the sumps at the plant and onto the ground outside. The sumps and underground holding pits, lead to the plant’s sewer lines, which other witnesses testified leaked.

Defense lawyers have contended that the three managers did knowingly violate federal environmental law or Army regulations.

Prosecutors are expected to complete their case today.
Defense Calls Aberdeen Proving Ground Environmental Trial a ‘Witch Hunt’

By Paul W. Valentine

BALTIMORE, Jan. 10—Federal prosecutors accused three civilian managers of the Army’s Aberdeen Proving Ground of allowing illegal storage and disposal of hazardous chemical waste materials there. The defense responded with accusations of a government “witch hunt.”

Prosecutor Jane F. Barrett said the three “turned their backs on responsibility” and ignored environmental laws.

“Big is a better term in the jury in U.S. District Court here today, defense attorney William D. Nelson called the case a ‘witch hunt’ and said the defendants ‘were guilty to the last moment.”

Another lawyer, Richard Karwowski, said what was most surprising about the case was the government’s decision to criminalize what were essentially, in his words, “innocent acts of government officials.”

If there is responsibility, it is that of the [military] commander of Aberdeen Proving Ground.

By Karen E. Warme

Federal prosecutors told a jury yesterday that three top civilian managers at Aberdeen Proving Ground violated federal law by mishandling hazardous chemicals at an aging chemical weapons research plant. The three managers, who were accused of failing to enforce laws regulating the handling of hazardous substances, were convicted of the charges.

“Defense attorneys said the defendants ‘turned their backs on responsibility’ and ignored environmental laws.

Mr. Barrett told the jury that the Army’s chemical research division and Mr. Leece were responsible for the production of chemical weapons and that they should have been held accountable for their actions.

Mr. Leece said that the defendants ‘were guilty to the last moment’ and that the defendants ‘should have been held accountable for their actions.’

The trial, which lasted three weeks, ended in a hung jury. The defendants were acquitted of all charges.

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FBI Investigation → Indictment → Trial → Conviction

“a virtual ‘Pandora’s Box’ of potential sources of contamination…”

February 23, 1989
Aberdeen Civilian Officials Guilty in Toxic Waste Case

By Mary W. Valenzuela

Aberdeen Civilian Officials Guilty in Toxic Waste Case

Aberdeen, Md. (AP) - Three managers found guilty in the Aberdeen toxic waste case were sentenced today to prison terms, with one of them receiving a prison term of more than six years.

The three managers, who were convicted of federal crimes in the case, were sentenced by U.S. District Court Judge Paul W. Vaillancourt. They are:

- Paul W. Vaillancourt, 54, who was sentenced to 6 1/2 years in federal prison.
- Richard S. Beach, 52, who was sentenced to 4 years in federal prison.
- Donald A. Fries, 50, who was sentenced to 3 years in federal prison.

The case involved allegations that the Aberdeen Proving Ground was releasing toxic chemicals into the environment, causing harm to the health of nearby residents.

Vaillancourt said the sentences were appropriate because of the severity of the offenses and the need to deter future crimes.

Voters in the Aberdeen area overwhelmingly approved a $50 million bond issue to clean up the toxic waste at the Proving Ground.

Fries, who is the manager of the Aberdeen Proving Ground's environmental protection program, was accused of failing to report the release of toxic chemicals.

Beach, who is the manager of the Aberdeen Proving Ground's environmental operations, was charged with violating federal environmental laws.

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“The case marks the first time federal officials have been convicted of routinely violating federal environmental laws.”
Sulfuric Acid leak $\rightarrow$ Fish kill $\rightarrow$ Response by APG Clean Up Personnel

Baltimore Sun coverage $\rightarrow$ Disgruntled employee

FBI Investigation $\rightarrow$ Indictment $\rightarrow$ Trial $\rightarrow$ Conviction

“a virtual ‘Pandora’s Box’ of potential sources of contamination…”
Major Changes

• Focus on Environmental Compliance
Thermal Treatment Facility
A board of officers is hereby appointed pursuant to AR 15-6 to conduct a comprehensive analysis of hazard management on Aberdeen Proving Ground. The board's investigative charter is outlined in letter, U. S. Army Aberdeen Proving Ground, STAIC, 7 May 86, subject: Hazard Management on Aberdeen Proving Ground (see enclosure). The board will, at a minimum, address the issues outlined in paragraphs 4 and 5 of that letter. However, it may, in addition, inquire into any area it deemed relevant and material to its deliberations.

1. A board of officers is hereby appointed pursuant to AR 15-6 to conduct a comprehensive analysis of hazard management on Aberdeen Proving Ground. The board's investigative charter is outlined in letter, U. S. Army Aberdeen Proving Ground, STAIC, 7 May 86, subject: Hazard Management on Aberdeen Proving Ground (see enclosure). The board will, at a minimum, address the issues outlined in paragraphs 4 and 5 of that letter. However, it may, in addition, inquire into any area it deemed relevant and material to its deliberations.

2. The following members are appointed to the board:

   COL Aaron D. Ravel, QM, USA (Chairman)
   LTC Jared Wells, NC, USARNG, Member
   COL J. J. D. Palmer, Jr., MR, USAG, Member
   LTC Robert F. Jones, NC, AFRNG, Member
   LTC Martin A. Long, NE, USAREC, Member
   Robert P. Tooley, CM-15, ESA, Member
   Robert J. Tork, CM-14, USAREC, Member
   Michael B. Parsons, CM-13, USAMC, Member
   James L. Kennedy, CM-13, USA, Member
   Sterling Purcell, CM-13, ESA, Member
   Frank J. M. B. Weidner, CM-13, USA, Member
   Robert J. King, CM-13, NC, AMC, Advisory Member (without vote)
   LTC Louis C. Lewis, MD, USATCOM, Recorder/Legal Advisor (without vote)
   Maj. Paul Jones, Jr.

3. The board will meet at the call of the President. It will utilize the procedures set forth in AR 15-6 applicable to normal boards.

4. The report of proceedings will be summarized and submitted to this headquarters. The board will furnish interim reports every 30 days which will outline the progress of the board and identify those areas which require the immediate attention of the appointing authority. At all times during its

23 May 1986

“A board of officers is hereby appointed pursuant to AR 15-6 to conduct a comprehensive analysis of hazard management on Aberdeen Proving Ground”

15-6 Board issued five interim reports over the next year and a final report on 7 May 87.

The six reports identified 124 specific directed actions, with 257 sub-elements, that were tracked for years to completion.

State environmental officials inspected every facility at CRDEC
The following substances are acute hazardous waste (H) and are subject to the exclusion defined in Regulation .05C of this chapter:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K991</th>
<th>Waste ethyl dimethylamidocyanophosphate, also known by the common names GA and Tabun and the following alternate chemical names: Ethyl N,N-dimethylphosphoramidocyanidate Dimethylamidoethoxyphosphoryl cyanide</th>
<th>(H)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K992</td>
<td>Waste isopropyl methanefluorophosphonate, also known by the common names GB and Sarin and the following alternate chemical names: Isopropyl methylphosphonofluoridate Isopropyl ester of methylphosphonofluoridic acid</td>
<td>(H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K993</td>
<td>Waste 3,3-dimethyl-n-but-2-yl methylphosphonofluoridate, also known by the common names GD and Soman and the following alternate chemical names: Pinacolyl methylphosphonofluoridate 1,2,2-trimethylpropyl methylphosphonofluoridate Pinacoloxymethylphosphoryl fluoride</td>
<td>(H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K994</td>
<td>Waste O-ethyl S-(2-dissopropyl-aminoethyl) methylphosphonothioate also know by the common name VX</td>
<td>(H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K995</td>
<td>Waste chlorovinylarsine dichloride, also known by the common names L and Lewisite and the following alternative chemical names: Dichloro (2-chlorovinyl) arsine 2-chlorovinylidichlorarsine</td>
<td>(H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K996</td>
<td>Waste phenarsazine chloride, also known by the common names DM and Adamsite</td>
<td>(H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K997</td>
<td>Waste bis(2-chloroethyl) sulfide, also known by the common names sulfur mustard, H, HS, and HD, which is distilled sulfur mustard</td>
<td>(H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K998</td>
<td>Waste 2-2'-di(3-chloroethylthio)-diethyl ether, also know by the common name T and the following alternate chemical name: Bis-(2-chloroethylthioethyl) ether</td>
<td>(H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K999</td>
<td>Waste, lethal, military warfare agents having any substances identified in the listings for hazardous waste numbers K991 through K998 as their active or principal ingredient or ingredients, such as HT, which is a mixture of sulfur mustard and bis-(2-chloroethylthioethyl) ether</td>
<td>(H)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
... the following is hereby ORDERED by the Director, Hazardous and Solid Waste Management Administration, and CONSENTED to by the Aberdeen Proving Ground:

August 1988

...
“As one part of our offensive to achieve compliance with all applicable Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and directives relating to safety, security, surety, environment, and management/disposal of hazardous waste, first line supervisors will, until further notice, personally perform biweekly inspections of all areas under their control.”
This statement reflects current compliance status to the best of my knowledge.
Major Changes

- Focus on Environmental Compliance
- Environmental Program
Environmental Quality Office Mission

The ECBC Environmental Quality Office (EQO) consists of a multi-disciplined team of scientists and engineers who provide a full range of environmental services in the areas of compliance, conservation and pollution prevention. The office has expertise in environmental issues related to Chemical Biological Defense research, development, testing and acquisition.

Technical expertise in compliance matters minimizes environmental risks for projects, whether in the lab or on the range. We employ pollution prevention strategies to lower lifecycle costs and impacts to the environment.

We continually strive to understand our customer’s needs while keeping abreast of current and future environmental issues and new legislation/regulations which may impact the Center, our customers and their programs.
The fulfillment of our national defense mission depends on our individual and organizational commitment to conserving resources and protecting the environment in which we live and work.
Environmental Quality Control Committee (EQCC)

- Air Subcommittee
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Subcommittee
- Pollution Prevention (P2) Subcommittee
- Natural Resources Subcommittee
- Environmental Management System (EMS) Subcommittee
- Water/Wastewater Subcommittee
- Solid & Hazardous Waste Subcommittee
Major Changes

- Focus on Environmental Compliance
- Environmental Program
- Relationship with State and Public
Much better relationship with public
Major Changes

- Focus on Environmental Compliance
- Environmental Program
- Relationship with State and Public
- Compliance status
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inspection</th>
<th>Date of Inspection</th>
<th>Regulation Requiring Inspection</th>
<th>Summary of Inspection Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HAZARDOUS WASTE - Temporary Storage Sites (TSS) and Permitted Facilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPA / MDE Annual</td>
<td>30-Aug-10</td>
<td>40 CFR 261 et seq</td>
<td>no adverse findings; positive comments made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st quarter 19-Dec-10</td>
<td>COMAR 26.13, APGR 200-60</td>
<td>Minor findings noted at four facilities. All corrected.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd quarter 3-Mar-10</td>
<td>COMAR 26.23, APGR 200-60</td>
<td>no deficiencies noted</td>
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<td>3rd quarter 24-May-10</td>
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<td>4th quarter 23-24 Aug 10</td>
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<td><strong>MDE Annual</strong></td>
<td>2-Apr-10</td>
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<td>1st quarter 1-Dec-09</td>
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<td><strong>Hazardous inventory tracking system (HITS) validation</strong></td>
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<td>Garrison Annual</td>
<td>8-18 Mar 10</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Passed w/ 95.8%</td>
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Remember the Lessons of History
THE END