

ATLANTIC FLEET WEAPONS TRAINING AREA – VIEQUES

Activities from 2001 to 2013

May 2013



Background

The island of Vieques, Puerto Rico, located approximately seven miles southeast of mainland Puerto Rico, was used by the U.S. Navy and NATO forces for military training operations from the 1940s to 2003. The Navy conducted training with live munitions on the former Vieques Naval Training Range, covering about 14,573 acres on the eastern end of the island, and stored munitions in an 8,200-acre area of western Vieques. About 10,000 residents live in and around two main towns on the island, which are located on the north and south coasts of Vieques in the third

of the island not previously used for military activities.

Live fire training ended on Vieques in 1999 after a civilian employee of the Navy was accidentally killed by a bomb during a training exercise. His death exacerbated public opposition to the continued military presence on the island. In April 2001, 4,250 acres of the Navy's property in western Vieques was transferred by Congress to the municipality of Vieques. In addition, Congress transferred eight hundred additional acres of western Vieques to the Puerto Rico Conservation Trust and the remainder was designated as a National Wildlife Refuge and placed under the control of the U.S. Department of Interior. On May 1, 2003, all Navy training on Vieques ceased. The military land on the eastern end of the island was transferred to the Department of Interior with the vast majority of that land to be administered as a National Wildlife Refuge. Within the Refuge is a designated wilderness conservation area with no public access.



In June 2003, former Governor of Puerto Rico, Sila Calderón, used the Commonwealth's one-time authority to propose areas of Vieques and Culebra (another nearby island) to be included on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund National Priorities List of contaminated sites. In February 2005, the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Area – Vieques was added to the Superfund list. No final Superfund determination has been made for Culebra. Since then, the Navy, with oversight by EPA and Puerto Rico Environmental Quality Board (EQB), has been engaged in a range of investigations and cleanup activities on the western and eastern ends of the island.

Site Cleanup

In 1987, President Reagan signed Executive Order 12580 entitled, "Superfund Implementation," which delegates to certain federal departments and agencies other than EPA the authority and responsibility to

implement certain provisions of the Superfund law. The lead agency for the cleanup of Vieques is the Department of the Navy. In 2007, as result of the Superfund listing, the Navy, EPA, EQB and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service entered into a Federal Facilities Agreement, which sets forth the roles of each party in the investigation, development, selection and implementation of responses to releases or threatened releases of hazardous substances, contaminants or pollutants that resulted from Navy activities and/or operations at the site.

Investigations to evaluate environmental conditions and assess the presence of munitions are ongoing. Eighteen munitions sites have been identified by the Navy for investigation, including the waters around Vieques and its cays, or small islands. All of these munitions sites are in east Vieques, with the exception of one site in west Vieques.

Activities to remove munitions also continue. As of April 2013:

- Out of an estimated area of over 9,000 acres to which access is restricted because of the presence of munitions, the surface of approximately 2,604 acres has been cleared. Additional evaluation of the sub-surface for the presence of munitions items is deemed to be needed.



- Approximately 38,386 munitions items have been collected and destroyed by blowing these up onsite.

- Over 16.9 million pounds of scrap metal have been processed, with over 13.2 million pounds sent offsite for recycling.

Three pilot studies have been conducted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Navy to assess technologies that could be safely used to detect

underwater munitions around the island. These assessments are ongoing and must also consider the presence of sensitive coral reefs. The Navy is going to conduct a bathymetric survey in 2013 and should complete an assessment of the underwater sites by 2015.

Final cleanup plans are in place at five sites. Of the four in west Vieques, no action was needed on one site and work was performed on the other three to remove contamination. No further action on the four sites is needed, and the land is now available for unrestricted use. The fifth site is a former landfill in east Vieques, located on property managed by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which will have a soil cover placed on it. Decision documents that set forth the selected responses to address contamination are anticipated for the remaining sites in west Vieques by 2014. Additional decision documents will be developed for areas in east Vieques as the investigation process for each is completed.

Navy contractors have hired and trained local residents to conduct site related work, including training thirty-one people to be unexploded ordnance technicians. Currently, 50 Vieques residents are employed on the site. Approximately \$30 million has been contributed to the local economy to date.

From 2005 to date, the Navy has spent approximately \$183 million on its activities on Vieques. The Navy is spending approximately \$19 million annually for ongoing work. Current estimates indicate that at least an additional \$330 million will be needed to complete this work. Current projections indicate that work at the site will be completed in 2022 for the land areas and in 2029 for the underwater effort. However, these dates are estimates and may change based on several factors, including results of ongoing investigations, construction schedules and funding. The table details the status of the munitions program to date.

Munitions Response Program as of April 2013

■ Progress on Areas Cleared (in acres)	
■ Total acres surface cleared to date	2,604
■ Total Live Impact Area	839
■ Total Eastern Conservation Area	136
■ Total Surface Impact Area	834
■ Total Eastern Maneuver Area	766
■ Total other areas	14
■ Progress on Munitions Removed	
■ Bombs live	595
■ Bombs requiring explosive venting (see note)	6,683
■ Projectiles/mortars live	9,042
■ Projectiles/mortars requiring explosive venting	4,784
■ Rockets live	686
■ Rockets requiring explosive venting	303
■ Flares/pyrotechnics	742
■ Sub-munitions live	12,800
■ Munitions components (fuses/boosters)	2,655
■ Igniters	96
■ Progress on Recycling (in pounds)	
■ Munitions debris inspected and recovered	7,886,000
■ Range related debris inspected and recovered	8,756,000
■ Material thermally processed:	4,420,000
■ Material demilitarized by shearing:	2,506,000
■ Material demilitarized by hammer mill:	879,000
■ Material demilitarized by cutting:	726,000
■ Material shipped to off-island recyclers:	13,238,000

Note – explosive venting is a procedure that uses a donor charge to confirm/verify that the munitions item is inert or does not contain high explosive

Contact Information:

Project:

Daniel Rodriguez
(787) 741-5201
Rodriguez.Daniel@epa.gov

Julio Vazquez
(212) 637-4323
Vazquez.Julio@epa.gov

Press:

Elias Rodriguez
(212) 637-3664
Rodriguez.Elias@epa.gov