PRESS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CHEMICAL MATERIALS AGENCY

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Media Update #4: M55 Rocket Fire Investigations

WHAT: A second group of nine rocket motor assemblies were separated from their corresponding M55 rockets at Pine Bluff Arsenal last week and will be shipped to Picatinny Arsenal for testing. The rocket motor assemblies are expected to be shipped to New Jersey the week of August 15. At Picatinny, they will undergo tests similar to the nine rocket motor assemblies that arrived from Umatilla, Ore., in June. All testing is a part of the ongoing investigation conducted by the U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency's rocket task force that is performing an in-depth investigation into fires that occurred at its Umatilla Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (UMCDF) in Oregon and Pine Bluff Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (PBCDF) in Arkansas. The fires occurred while processing drained GB-filled M55 rockets in an Explosive Containment Room designed specifically to contain such an event.

A diversified team at Picatinny is conducting tests on the M28 propellant grain, which will involve compositional analysis, sensitivity (friction and impact) testing, inhibitor layer testing, and other tests on the M62 igniter. A preliminary report on the Umatilla findings was issued in August 2005 (see Media Update #3). A similar report can be expected on the Pine Bluff rockets in September-October with both reports eventually combined into a final report.

The in-depth investigation started after fires at the Umatilla and Pine Bluff facilities in April and May of 2005. Since then, these sites have experienced more fires. Umatilla had one on July 29; Pine Bluff had two, one during maintenance operations on July 17 and another with a rocket on August 13. In all cases, there was never any danger to personnel or any release of agent to the environment.

WHEN: Rocket motor assemblies are awaiting shipment from Pine Bluff to Picatinny this week.

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www.cma.army.mil

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The investigation into the Umatilla rocket motor assemblies is finished. A preliminary report has been completed (see Media Update #3). The remaining sections of tested rockets parts are being shipped back to Umatilla where they will be placed in storage for eventual disposal in the Umatilla Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (UMCDF) per international treaty requirements.

WHO: Mr. Michael Parker, Director of the U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency, appointed Mr. Gregory St. Pierre, Director of CMA's Risk Management, to lead the rocket task force. St. Pierre has 22 years of experience in chemical weapons risk mitigation and problem solving.

CMA COMMENT: Mr. St. Pierre said, "These nine assemblies from Pine Bluff will undergo a battery of tests and analyses like the items from Umatilla. We are looking to see if there are similarities as well as differences. The fires at these two sites are comparable yet different. The fires in Umatilla have been occurring on the fifth cut, with an associated low-level pressure pulse. The fires at Pine Bluff are occurring as the chopped pieces sit on the gate while awaiting disposal in the Deactivation Furnace System. We are still looking into why the fires are occurring and hope this continuing analysis leads us to a definitive answer."

ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS: The rocket task force includes a mix of experts from CMA, Washington Group International (WGI), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Southwest Research Institute, Sandia National Laboratory, EG&G, and the U.S. Army Armaments Engineering & Technology Center.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Two preliminary reports, one a review of the Explosive Containment Room (ECR) structure design and one an assessment of whether or not the increased frequency of fires increases the risk to the public from M55 rocket disposal operations, are available on the web at www.cma.army.mil. To date, preliminary assessments have indicated that the rockets remain stable in storage and during routine handling operations. All fires have been associated only with rockets involved in the actual shearing/disposal process.

More information will be released as it becomes available.

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The U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency is responsible for safely storing and eliminating the United States' aging chemical weapons and agent stockpiles and for the safe elimination of recovered chemical materiel.