



# PRESS RELEASE

## U.S. ARMY CHEMICAL MATERIALS AGENCY

**For Immediate Release:**  
September 22, 2005

**For More Information Contact:**  
Gregory Mahall  
U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency  
Public Affairs Office  
Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21010  
Phone: (410) 436-3629  
E-mail: [gregory.mahall@us.army.mil](mailto:gregory.mahall@us.army.mil)

### Media Update #5: M55 Rocket Fires Investigation

**WHAT:** Testing continues at Picatinny Arsenal, N.J., on nine M55 rocket motor assemblies from Pine Bluff Arsenal shipped in mid-August. Testing will largely mirror that of earlier analyses completed on nine other rocket motor assemblies shipped from Umatilla Chemical Depot, Ore.

Several new analyses are being added to create a comprehensive examination as to the cause of the rocket fires occurring during disposal operations at these two sites. Army experts have collaborated to provide compositional analysis and sensitivity (friction and impact) testing on the propellant grain of all nine rocket motor assemblies currently at Picatinny. New tests include a booster cup test, an M62 igniter friction test and an M62 igniter wire pull test. Electrostatic discharge testing, originally completed on the first group of rocket motor assemblies from Oregon, has been omitted in this round of testing because initial testing provided unconvincing results.

The analyses continue under the auspices of a task force of experts assembled by CMA to investigate the cause of several rocket fires that occurred at Umatilla Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (UMCDF) and Pine Bluff Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (PBCDF) earlier this year. The fires occurred during regular processing of drained GB-filled M55 rockets in explosive containment rooms specifically designed in case of such events.

**WHEN:** Testing is expected to continue through October and a preliminary report is expected to be released in early November. A final report incorporating findings from all testing on rocket motor assemblies from Umatilla, Ore., and Pine Bluff, Ark., will be released in late November. Results will be posted on the CMA web site at [www.cma.army.mil](http://www.cma.army.mil)

**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.

For more information,  
contact the  
Chemical Materials  
Agency Public  
Affairs Office.

[www.cma.army.mil](http://www.cma.army.mil)

- more -



# PRESS RELEASE

## U.S. ARMY CHEMICAL MATERIALS AGENCY

**CMA COMMENT:** Mr. St. Pierre said, "While previous testing has led to inconclusive evidence, testing on this new batch of rocket motor assemblies will help provide a more well-rounded approach to this issue. Lessons learned from earlier testing has shed some new light onto our existing theories and has led to the addition of several new tests. We expect that the addition of these additional tests will yield greater knowledge of the status of M55 rockets in the stockpile. Every effort is being made to ensure a comprehensive and impartial look into what is causing these fires."

**ASSESSMENT PARTICIPANTS:** The rocket task force includes a combination of experts from CMA, Washington Group International (WGI), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Southwest Research Institute, Sandia National Laboratory, EG&G, Mitretek Systems, Army Research Laboratory 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 the other an assessment of whether 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](http://www.cma.army.mil).

A preliminary report on the first group of testing completed on nine Umatilla rocket motor assemblies has been completed and a final report is planned once all testing is complete. Preliminary assessments indicate that there are no long-term effects in storing the rockets and they remain safe 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.

-- 30 --

*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.*

For more information,  
contact the  
Chemical Materials  
Agency Public  
Affairs Office.

[www.cma.army.mil](http://www.cma.army.mil)