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Army Corps will remove Harley-area ammo

By JOHN BUGBEE
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By later this summer residents living near the Harley-Davidson Inc. plant in Springettsbury Township will likely hear small explosions as U.S. Army Corps of Engineers experts begin destroying World War II naval ordnance buried on the plant site.

The explosions will sound like shotguns firing in the distance, Harley officials assured residents at a community meeting last night to explain the removal of old ammunition used to test-fire naval deck guns built at the plant.

Engineers' work on WWII-era leftovers begins in August

How much is there?
"That's the \$50,000 question," said George Follett, an expert on explosives and ordnance who will be part of the Army Corps' team carrying out the operation. It is scheduled to begin in August and will take about two months to complete.

"There could be 50 or there could be 10,000."

The history of the ordnance goes back to the 1940s, when 3-inch

naval guns were manufactured at what was then the York Safe and Lock Co. Before the guns were shipped, they were test-fired using dummy projectiles shot into sand bunkers in a 100-foot-long enclosed firing range.

However, Follett explained, any test-ammunition that misfired at the range was buried in pits on the plant grounds.

Supposed to be dummies: And although the projectiles fired into war. Components were made and

assembled when the plant was operated as the York Naval Ordnance Plant in the early 1960s, and later when American Machine and Foundry took over in 1964.

Because Harley now needs the range area to expand parking for tractor-trailers, the old ammo will have to be destroyed before work can proceed.

Chemical cleanup: Another legacy left by years the plant was used by the defense industry was a stew of chemicals and metals contaminating soil and groundwater.

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Cleanup has been under way since the early '90s, and at last night's meeting, Harley officials gave a progress report.

Additional monitoring wells will be sunk, contaminated soil will be treated, and groundwater treatment at Harley's water treatment plant will continue indefinitely, said Sharon Fisher, Harley's environmental engineer.

The soil and water contaminants include degreasing solvents, petroleum byproducts and metals.

"These items are typical for manufacturing plants during the 1940s, '50s and '60s," she said, before environmental laws were enacted.

Although the company sent out more than 200 announcements, only seven residents showed up at the meeting held at the Sheraton Four Points on Toronita Street.

"We're kind of disappointed. We expected a bigger

turnout," said Harley spokeswoman Pat Sweeney.

Response to information: Sherman Street resident Fred Reidel said he appreciated the information the company provided about the removal of the ordnance and efforts to clean up the plant site.

"It's nice that someone is taking care of it," he said. "Everybody knew that the place was contaminated. It's not anything Harley did."

As for the danger that removing the old ammunition might pose, Reidel said he's satisfied the company is working to minimize the risk.

"There's no danger in that at all," he said, admitting he didn't know there was ordnance on the plant grounds until he received the company's meeting announcement earlier this month.

But Bea Weitkamp, who's lived near the plant since the late 1930s, said despite the company's assurances, she remains skeptical.

"I'm quite concerned about what's going to happen," she told plant officials. "We're feeling we're sitting on a pile of dynamite out there."

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