



Richmond NAS Headquarters Building in 1944



MARCH 2015

DEFENSE ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION PROGRAM FOR FORMERLY USED DEFENSE SITES

Across the country, the Department of Defense acquired properties, often during times of war, to use for military training, testing and demonstrations. When no longer needed, many of these properties were cleaned up according to the best practices available at the time and then transferred to other owners such as private individuals or other government entities. These Formerly Used Defense Sites (FUDS) can range from privately owned farms to National Parks. They also include residential, industrial and educational properties. We are committed to protecting people and the environment and improving public safety by cleaning up these properties. The Defense Environmental Restoration Program for Formerly Used Defense Sites was established to evaluate and, if necessary, to remediate Formerly Used Defense Sites. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) manages the program on behalf of the Department of Defense.

Congress passed the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, also known as Superfund, in 1980 and the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act in 1986. These laws give the Corps the authority for certain cleanup activities and dictate the process we must follow. We conduct investigations to determine the potential risk to people and the environment from the military's use of the property. Public involvement and community participation are important components of the process. The Corps partners with stakeholders throughout the process, including congressional representatives, state and local governments, regulatory and environmental agencies, and affected property owners.

BACKGROUND

The U.S. Navy began constructing Richmond Naval Air Station in 1942 as a Lighter-Than-Air blimp base. The approximately 2,108-acre base was designed to be entirely self-sufficient and included a mess hall, medical clinic, recreational areas, barracks, and water and sewer systems. The Navy also constructed three blimp hangars; mooring-out sites; a helium plant; and maintenance, propeller, battery, welding, plating, and paint shops, along with other support facilities. The hangars were more than 1,000 feet long, 175 feet high and 297 feet wide with an interior floor space of approximately 7 acres. In addition to being home to a blimp squadron, Richmond Naval Air Station also provided maintenance services and supplies to the airships in the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean region.



Blimps patrolled the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico to protect allied marine fleets from German U-boats. The blimp crews would monitor allied ships and would report if they identified any U-boats.

In September 1945, the area began preparing for a hurricane. Believing the hangers at Richmond Naval Air Station were hur-

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ricane proof, the military moved aircraft from nearby bases into the blimp hangars. By the time the hurricane hit, more than 300 aircraft were in the hangars along with 25 blimps. During the storm, the roof of Hangar 1 blew off, and shortly thereafter, a fire blazed that quickly spread to the other hangars. Within hours, all three hangars and everything in them were destroyed. The base was never re-built, and by November 1945, it was closed.

The University of Miami, Miami-Dade County Division of Parks and Recreation, Federal Bureau of Prisons and the Coast Guard now own the property that comprises the former Richmond Naval Air Station.

ENVIRONMENTAL INVESTIGATIONS

Over the years, the Corps has conducted a number of investigations and remedial actions at the former Richmond Naval Air Station, including removing structures, debris, and underground storage tanks. Previous studies have detected petroleum products and metals in the soil and water in the area of the former incinerator (now on the Federal Bureau of Prison's land). In the area of Hangars 1 and 2 (now home of the Gold Coast Railroad Museum), studies have detected petroleum products, solvents and metals in the soil.



The Corps is doing a Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study in the areas of the former incinerator and Hangars 1 and 2. The purpose of the Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study is to characterize the nature and extent of impacts to the environment caused by the military's use of the land. In other words, the Corps wants to determine what may be present, in what locations and concentrations. Fieldwork, which is scheduled to begin the summer of 2015, will include collecting soil and water samples.

Once the fieldwork is complete, the Corps will analyze the data, draft a report and make recommendations. The results will be summarized in a document called a Proposed Plan which will present the alternatives for addressing what, if anything, remains on the site. The alternatives can range from no further action being necessary to educating the public about the site to remedial action. When the Proposed Plan is ready, the Corps will present it at a public meeting, and the public will have at least 30 days to review and submit comments on the plan.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit:
Project documents can be viewed at:
Coral Reef Branch Library
9211 SW 152nd St, Miami, FL 33157
Telephone: 305.233.8324

Contact:
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District
Toll-Free 866.279.4880
FUDS.Florida@usace.army.mil
www.saj.usace.army.mil



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