

# Peninsula

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## Navy seeks to speed Moffett's tox

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As squadrons of submarine-hunting P-3s prepare to depart Moffett Field as part of the base shutdown, Navy officials are moving to accelerate the cleanup of the contaminated soil and toxic groundwater that will be left behind.

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Under a new proposal, the Superfund cleanup of some areas of the Navy base could begin by September 1993, three years and four months earlier than originally planned.

Navy officials said it wasn't possible to speed the \$140 million cleanup of the 58-year accumulation of solvents, spilled fuels and PCB-laced oils. Now, they plan to separate the base's 19 toxic sites into groups in order to decontaminate the worst areas first, including the

source of a toxic plume headed toward San Francisco Bay.

"By breaking the sites into units, we can accelerate," said Jim Haas, the new director of Moffett's environmental division. "Then each unit becomes a separate problem unto itself."

Though the proposal hasn't been approved, federal regulators and environmental groups have expressed support for the Navy's plan.

"It makes sense," said Lewi Tani, the Environmental Protection Agency project manager who

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obsolete military bases. The Navy will continue to have responsibility for the toxic cleanup after the closure.

Under the complex and often arcane rules of environmental cleanup, the Navy must make a detailed study of the contaminated areas, complete a feasibility study and arrive at a "record of decision" approved by the EPA before beginning the cleanup effort itself.

Because some areas of the base require more extensive study than others, the old schedule did not call for the cleanup of any areas to begin until January 1997. The cleanup itself will take an additional 8-10 years, officials estimate.

Under the new plan, officials estimate the cleanup can begin in September 1993 on the contaminated groundwater on the west side of base. From there, an underground plume contaminated by oils, fuels and solvents is moving north toward San Francisco Bay. The plume contains toxics left from a waste transfer area, an old fuel farm and abandoned tanks and sumps.

Next in line for cleanup, beginning in 1994, is the contaminated soil from landfills, runways, work

areas and underground tanks.

The last area to be tackled will be the wetlands area at the edge of the bay. The EPA has sunk wells to monitor the extent of the contamination, but the test results are so far inconclusive.

"What we think may be the problem with the wetlands is the migration of the groundwater plume, so we want to take care of that first," Haas said.

Even after all that work is done, however, Moffett Field's toxic contamination problems won't be over. Officials have identified three new sites — another landfill, an old service station and a fuel pipeline — that may require cleanup.

And NASA/Ames has estimated that it will cost an additional \$14.8 million to remove asbestos, replace transformers that contain PCBs, and remove underground storage tanks that aren't included in the list of Superfund sites.

Finally, the Navy is expected to be held responsible for a portion of the estimated \$60 million cleanup costs of a separate Superfund site known as the Middlefield-Ellis-Whisman site. Contaminated groundwater from that site has migrated under the Bayshore freeway and mingled with Moffett's contamination. Mitani said