

Sunday, Sep. 13, 2009

[Comments \(0\)](#)

Plans being made for chemical depot's future

By Annette Cary, Herald staff writer

HERMISTON -- Officials are ready to start showing off the Umatilla Chemical Depot to prospective buyers.

The last of the chemical weapons stored on the site are expected to be incinerated sometime between next summer and summer 2011, and the site already has been listed as surplus, said Umatilla County Commissioner Bill Hansell.

The Umatilla Army Depot Re-Use Authority, which Hansell chairs, is working with the Army to develop a land use, economic and environmental protection plan for the depot acreage. The plan will consider possible property available for redevelopment once weapons destruction and cleanup are done.

While the Army will consider selling surplus buildings and property, it also will consider proposals to benefit the public good. Future uses also could include keeping native shrub steppe habitat as wildland.

As planning gets under way for the future of the depot, the reuse authority has hired the team of Dana Engineering and MSE in the Tri-Cities to evaluate base properties and buildings and help prepare a proposal. The federal Base Realignment and Closure process requires that a plan be developed that considers all of the assets and infrastructure on the land before a property transfer can happen.

Already federal agencies have been notified that the 19,728 acres that lie in Umatilla and Morrow counties will be available for reuse, but no agency has indicated interest, said Brian Cole, executive director of the Dana Mission Support Team.

Next, leaders of public agencies are invited to tour the depot Sept. 22 to learn about the closing of the base and how to submit a Notice of Interest to acquire property.

Organizations and agencies that might be interested include groups connected with airports, prisons, historic monuments, law enforcement, ports, parks, public health, schools, self-help housing and wildlife conservation, according to the Dana Mission Support Team. Federal law also requires agencies that house the homeless to be given consideration.

A second tour is planned Oct. 21 for businesses and members of the public interested in buying base property for development. Those interested must submit a notice by 5 p.m. Nov. 23.

The depot includes some contaminated areas that could prevent a transfer once chemical weapon incineration is complete. That includes a portion in the northwest where ammunition was exploded. In addition, explosives were washed out of shell casings in another area and nitrate contamination has spread in the ground.

Before the site was used to store chemical weapons, it was used to store and maintain military items ranging from blankets to ammunition, starting in 1941. In 1962 its use changed and it began to store about 12 percent of the nation's chemical weapons.

All nerve gas stored at the depot has been incinerated and work is under way to destroy mustard agent, the last chemical weapon stored at the site.

The incinerator complex, the Umatilla Chemical Agent Disposal Facility, will be taken down when the last of the chemical agent is destroyed.

Plans also call for the support buildings to come down, Hansell said, but a permit modification could be sought to allow them to remain if there's interest in reusing them.

The southeast corner of the depot includes a complex of buildings and barracks, some dating from World War II, and good access to Interstate 84. There is another group of industrial buildings in the southwest corner of the depot that have not been maintained.

The Dana Mission Support Team will be taking a look at the site's assets, market conditions and what kind of uses might be appropriate.

A community meeting will be held in the spring to consider the proposed plan before it is adopted by the Umatilla Army Depot Re-Use Authority and presented to the Army.

Agency leaders who want to attend the 8 a.m. to noon Sept. 22 tour must register by 5 p.m. Sept. 17 to meet security requirements.

Registration for the Oct. 21 public tours begins Sept. 23. Call 541-922-9339 for registration information.

-- Annette Cary: 582-1533; acary@tricityherald.com