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## Toxins in sea worry officials

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Officials in Hawai'i and Washington, D.C., are demanding information from the Department of Defense on more than 8,000 tons of chemical weapons that were dumped off O'ahu at the end of World War II and may still be there.

The weapons and bulk chemical containers include the lethal toxins hydrogen cyanide and cyanogen chloride and the blistering agents mustard and lewisite. In 1944 and 1945, the military dumped much of its chemical weapons supply into the oceans of the world, including waters as close as five miles from shore and as shallow as 1,000 feet deep off Wai'anae, Pearl Harbor and Honolulu Harbor.

An Army spokesman last week said there is no danger of the toxic chemicals washing up on O'ahu beaches, but he was unable to say how the Army came to that conclusion. The Army has not responded to Advertiser requests over the past week for additional information on the situation.

In 1976, several Hawai'i maritime workers received chemical burns to their feet when they dredged up off Honolulu Harbor leaking containers of a blistering agent, possibly the chemical munition mustard. **An Environmental Protection Agency report says that in July 2004, three explosives demolition workers on the East Coast were injured by a mustard agent from an explosive shell dredged up off New Jersey.**

U.S. Rep. Neil Abercrombie, D-Hawai'i, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, said yesterday he isn't second-guessing the military's decision to dump the chemical weapons 60 years ago, in "a different era, at a time when the consequences were not understood the way they are today." But he is concerned that the Department of Defense has had updated reports on the dumping for several years and appears to have done nothing about them.

"The military has not handled this well at all. It has had these reports, all of which were kind of hiding in plain sight. They should have been proactive on this," he said. "Anybody with any sense would realize that the information would come to light eventually."

Abercrombie has written to Army Secretary Francis J. Harvey to ask for a full report on what the Army knows about the dumping near Hawai'i, what it knows about the current condition and location of the dumped munitions, and any information on the human health and environmental threats posed by the materials.

"What has to happen here, is there's got to be a risk assessment made," He said.

Abercrombie said the issue is on the agenda for a meeting this week of Hawai'i's congressional delegation.

Citing a 2001 Army report and other sources, the Newport News Daily Press in Virginia reported last week that the United States dumped chemical weapons and bulk chemical warfare agents into the world's oceans and off 11 states.

Since then, some East Coast members of Congress have called for hearings on the issue, and Sen. John Warner, R-Va., has filed a formal request for more information about dumping in the nearshore waters of the Atlantic.

In Hawai'i, Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann has asked the Defense Department's Pacific Command for a briefing "to see how best we can address the issue," said the mayor's spokes-man, Bill Brennan.

(snip)