2nd waste site explosion prompts action by DEQ

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The Department of Environmental Quality has ordered the U.S. Army not to send more explosive wastes to the Chemical Waste Management hazardous waste site in Calcasieu Parish after a second explosion at that site.

The Army was also told that it may still be subject to fines of $25,000 a day for previously sending explosive devices to the disposal facility, which DEQ says is not licensed to receive such materials.

A spokesman for the disposal firm said the company had not agreed to receive live materials from the Army and is authorized to take the type of material it had contracted to dispose.

Gerald Walter, attorney for the firm, described last week's incident as minor.

A smoke grenade ignited when the buried drum containing it was run over by a bulldozer at the site, according to Walter.

In February, a similar device ignited and caused a fire in a nearby mixing basin for chemical wastes.

"We can't afford to have disposal of explosives at our hazardous waste sites," DEQ Secretary Pat Norton said after issuing the order to the Army and a similar order to Chemical Waste Management, instructing the firm to receive no more such works.

The job from which the wastes that caused the problem were shipped is already complete, said Walter.

The materials came from a cleanup at the Pine Bluff Arsenal in Arkansas.

Explosion

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the attorney said.

While Chemical Waste Management was involved in that cleanup, the firm was not allowed to go into the bunker where the materials that later caused the problem were stored, he said.

Those materials were put in drums by the Army and turned over to the firm for disposal, he said.

The first incident occurred because the Army failed to remove a triggering device from a smoke grenade, which blew the top off a barrel while it was being shoved by a bulldozer at the disposal site near Lake Charles. The heat set off a fire in the mixing basin.

At first the Army denied responsibility for the problem, saying that all of the triggering devices had been removed, but the disposal company subsequently found more of the smoke grenades with triggering devices still in place, he said.

The latest incident apparently did not involve a triggering device, but was caused by a drum being snagged on a bulldozer blade. That resulted in friction, which caused a heat buildup that set off the powder, he said.

The company has elected to put a clay cap four feet thick over the area where the arsenal wastes are buried to prevent any more incidents of that type, he said.

No one was injured in either incident, Walter said.

DEQ said the Army was in violation of state environmental regulations by sending explosive wastes to a facility that does not have a permit to handle such materials.

The Army also used waste identification numbers that "were not the proper designations for explosive wastes," according to the order.

The Army failed to forward complete originals of the manifests to DEQ within seven days after receiving the completed manifests from the site operator and also failed to provide information on the manifests about how to handle the wastes in case of an emergency.

Those items all constitute violations of the state's hazardous waste regulations, according to the order.

In addition to ordering the disposal firm to stop receiving explosive wastes, DEQ also ordered the company to submit a detailed report on the matter.