



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GAO STUDY HELPS UNDERSCORE CLEAN-UP DIFFICULTIES

(HONOLULU, April 16, 2002) -- The General Accounting Office's study on Defense contamination handling and record keeping in Guam is the result of an audit that points out the consequences of shortfalls in policy guidance and the lack of funding in conducting clean-up operations at Formerly Used Defense Sites (FUDS) throughout the Pacific. Prioritization of sites is based on the immediacy of threat to the health, safety and well-being of the public at large with projects identified accordingly.

Honolulu Engineer District commander Lt. Col. Ronald N. Light said that clearly the Corps would like to conduct more clean-up operations, but receives limited funding for such tasks each year. During the past four years that amount has risen from \$4 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 99 to \$8.37 million in FY02. In FY00, when Honolulu District was involved in the clean-up of World War II-era chemical agent identification kits on private property in Mongmong, Guam, it spent \$2.8 million or 44 percent of its budget for that year on cleaning up that site alone. At the current rate of growth it will take decades to put a dent in all of the FUDS sites that have been identified throughout Hawaii and the Pacific.

Following the audit, efforts are already underway to make changes in policy that ensure improvements in communications and to improve the FUDS process. The study brings important attention to the fact that while the Corps of Engineers is very interested in cleaning up sites, funds are available to address only those sites posing the most immediate threat.