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Corps Offers Certified Unexploded Ordnance Training on Big Island

By Dino W. Buchanan, Honolulu Engineer District Public Affairs

(HONOLULU – June 10, 2005 – NR-15-05) The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is offering a five-week training course for Big Island residents to assist in the safe detection, location, identification and disposal of unexploded ordnance (UXO).

Residents applying for one of the more than 20 available training billets can graduate as a certified unexploded-ordnance technician Level 1 and be eligible to apply for jobs in connection with the Formerly Used Defense Sites (FUDS) program, including the cleanup at the 135,000-acre Waikoloa Maneuver Area on the island of Hawaii. Entry-level unexploded-ordnance technicians usually earn about \$15 to \$20 per hour.

The training course is being offered through Texas A& M University. The Honolulu District FUDS program is currently in a five-year, \$50 million contract awarded to American Technologies Inc. for removal of the UXO in the Waikoloa and Waimea areas. The intent of the training is to improve awareness of potential risks from unexploded ordnance among community members and to have trained individuals ready locally as jobs become available throughout the course of this contract and other future FUDS work.

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A formal schedule for the training has not been made but will be determined once potential trainees have been selected by the Honolulu District. A number of qualifications must be met to be eligible for training including a physical examination, finger printing and a police background search. Selection of potential trainees shall be completed by August 2005. Training could start before the end of the year or the very beginning of 2006 in either in Hawaii and / or Texas. Trainees will not receive a salary during the five-week period, but all travel, lodging, food and training expenses will be paid. Employment afterward is not guaranteed.

The Waikoloa FUDS project was expanded from 123,000 acres to 135,000 acres last year after undeveloped land between Queen Kaahumanu Highway and the shoreline was determined by the Corps to be of concern.

Live ordnance found in the area includes grenades, bazooka rounds, artillery and mortar rounds, land mines, and hedgehog missiles. At least six people have been killed or injured by old artillery rounds since the 1940s and there have been more recent events in which UXO was found near schools or uncovered by children at play. So far, around 650 live rounds have been recovered with no injuries to staff or residents.

The Waikoloa FUDS area received a top risk assessment rating because of the 20,000 or so people who live and work within the project's boundaries and the large number of tourists frequenting the area.

Ordnance clearance was started in late January 2004 and is continuing through the present time. Thus far over 3,000 acres of land have been cleared of unexploded ordnance in lands bordering neighborhoods in Waikoloa Village, Waimea, Lalamilo, and Ouli.

Throughout the UXO cleanup, crews on the Big Island are developing new methods to detect and clear ordnance which have been adopted at other sites around the country. Some are as low-tech as sandbag enclosures built in such a way as to eliminate most of the concussion and fragmentation from a detonation.

"We've been able to cut down the 'frag zone' to the point where we can pretty much guarantee safety to 200 feet," according to Chuck Streck, Waikoloa FUDS project manager for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - Honolulu Engineer District.

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Streck says subsurface ordnance detectors have been refined to a point where they now distinguish between a pipe or other debris and a piece of ordnance, without requiring workers to dig it up. This results in crews now clearing 35 percent to 40 percent more ground than before.

The area's rough terrain still requires use of hand-held detection devices or a "towed array" mounted on a cart and pulled by workers.

"There's no other way to do it. It's too rough," says Streck. "But with the detection refinements and potential of added manpower we are on schedule with the Waikoloa FUDS cleanup."

For more information on the UXO training course contact Clayton Sugimoto of Wil-Chee Planning Inc. at 596-4688 or e-mail wcp@lava.net, or Chuck Streck of the Army Corps of Engineers at 438-6934, or e-mail Chuck.F.Streck@poh01.usace.army.mil.

For information on the Waikoloa Maneuver Area Unexploded Ordnance Project, visit http://www.poh.usace.army.mil/proj_env_waikoloa.asp.

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