Dated: June 3, 1998.

Raymond J. Fatz,

Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army (Environment, Safety and Occupational Health) (OASA (I, L&E).

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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Department of the Army

Notice of Availability of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Pilot Testing of Neutralization/ Supercritical Water Oxidation at Newport Chemical Depot, Indiana

AGENCY: Department of the Army, DOD.

ACTION: Notice of Availability (NOA).

SUMMARY: This announces the availability of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) which assesses the potential environmental impacts of the construction and operation of a facility to pilot test the chemical neutralization process followed by supercritical water oxidation (SCWO) as a potential disposal technology for the bulk agent VX stored at Newport Chemical Depot (NECD). The proposed facility will be used to demonstrate, as part of a research and development program, the neutralization process followed by SCWO, to destroy VX agent currently stored in ton containers at NECD.

The two alternatives considered in this DEIS are the proposed action and no action (i.e., continued storage of VX in ton containers). Although the no action alternative is not viable under Pub. L. 99–145, it was analyzed to provide a comparison with the proposed action. In addition, the no action alternative would not comply with Public Law 102–484, which specifies that the Army must consider using a technological alternative to incineration.

DATES: The public comment period for the DEIS will end 45 days after publication of the NOA in the **Federal Register** by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. All public comments received on the DEIS will be considered and addressed in the final EIS and also considered by the Army in its Record of Decision.

ADDRESSES: To obtain copies of the DEIS, contact Ms. Mona Harney, NECD Public Affairs Office, at (765) 245–4597 or write to: Department of the Army, Newport Chemical Activity, P.O. Box 121, Newport, Indiana 47966–0121.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Office of the Program Manager for Chemical Demilitarization, ATTN: SFAE–CD–P (Ms. Catherine Herlinger), Building E4585, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, 21010–5401; telephone: (800) 488–0648 or (410) 671–1479; e-mail: cherling@cdra.apgea.army.mil.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The DEIS concludes that VX stored in bulk containers can be pilot tested at NECD using the neutralization process, followed by SCWO, in a safe and environmentally acceptable manner. At one time, the option of sending the neutralization hydrolysate to an off-site biotreatment facility was under consideration by the Army. However, technical and programmatic evaluations have concluded that off-site biotreatment is not suitable at this time. Therefore, off-site biotreatment is not addressed further in this EIS.

Dated: June 2, 1998.

Raymond J. Fatz,

Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army, (Environment, Safety and Occupational Health) OASA (I,L&E).

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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Department of the Army

Notice of Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Land Exchange Between Fort Benning and the City of Columbus, Georgia

AGENCY: U.S. Army Infantry Center and Fort Benning, Fort Benning, Georgia; Department of the Army, DoD.

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: The United States Army will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to assess the potential environmental impacts of the exchange of tracts of land between Fort Benning and the City of Columbus (hereafter referred to as the City). Section 2829 of Public Law 101–510, enacted November 5, 1990, authorized a land exchange between the City and Fort Benning. Fort Benning would convey approximately 3,000 acres of land to the City; and in exchange, the City would convey to Fort Benning approximately 3,300 acres located on the southern boundary of the military reservation. Those land tracts were refined by survey to 3,106 and 3,228 acres, respectively. The City intended to use the land for economic development, passive recreation and a sanitary landfill. Fort Benning would use the land it receives for dismounted light infantry training. A Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the **Federal Register**, June 27, 1994 (59 FR 32957), and a scooping meeting was held in Columbus, GA, on July 20, 1994. Due to changes in the proposed project and the length of time since prior scoping, this NOI provides an opportunity for more current public involvement based on newer information.

ALTERNATIVES: The proposed North-South tract land exchange will be evaluated for the following alternatives:

No-Action Alternative: No land would be exchanged under this alternative. Impacts associated with the Fort Benning mission and land use will be evaluated for the North tract. Impacts associated with the City's projected use of the South tract will also be analyzed.

Maximum Development: This alternative would provide approximately 2,110 acres of the North tract for economic/light industrial development. Also, approximately 650 acres of the North tract would become a Parks and Recreation Area near Bull Creek for the purpose of wetland mitigation. The Army would use the South tract for dismounted light infantry training.

Partial Development (preferred alternative): This alternative would also include an approximately 650 acre and Parks and Recreation Area near Bull Creek for wetlands mitigation on the North tract. A Habitat Conservation Area would be established and managed for protected species on approximately 710 acres. The remaining North tract property (approximately 1,400 acres) would be developable. The Army would use the South tract for dismounted light infantry training.

Minimum Development: This alternative would preserve all existing protected species and habitat on approximately 1,375 acres on the North tract. Also the approximately 650 acre Parks and Recreation Area would be established for wetlands protection, leaving only approximately 735 acres of developable land. The Army would use the South tract for dismounted light infantry training.

SCOPING: Comments received as a result of this notice will be used to assist Fort Benning in identifying additional alternatives for study, significant resources to be evaluated, as well as potential impacts to the quality of the human and natural environments. Individuals or organizations wishing to participate in the scoping process may forward their written comments to: U.S. Army Infantry Center, Directorate of Public Works, Environmental Management Division (ATTN: Mr. John Brent), Fort Benning, Georgia 31905–