



A Brief History of Rocky Mountain Arsenal

Historical Timeline

Rocky Mountain Arsenal (Arsenal) is located in Commerce City, Colorado, approximately 10 miles northeast of downtown Denver. In 1942, at the height of World War II, the U.S. Army purchased 17,000 acres of land on which to manufacture chemical weapons, such as mustard gas, white phosphorus and napalm to be used as a deterrent during wartime efforts.

To foster economic growth in the area, offset operational costs and maintain the facilities for national security, private industry was encouraged to lease facilities at the Arsenal after the war. Under the lease program, Julius Hyman and Co. began producing pesticides in 1946. In 1952, Shell Chemical Co. acquired Julius Hyman and Co. and continued to produce agricultural pesticides on site until 1982.

Currently, there are no chemicals or chemical weapons produced or stored at the Arsenal and the site's only mission is to complete the safe, timely and cost-effective cleanup and continued transition to one of the largest urban national wildlife refuges.

Environmental Issues

Wastes generated during production years at the Arsenal were disposed of using widely accepted practices of the time. Efforts to contain liquid wastes began soon after the discovery that contaminated groundwater caused crop damage north of the Arsenal in the mid 1950s.

The Army and Shell began a systematic investigation into the contamination problems, which resulted in the Army's Installation Restoration Program. Beginning in 1974, Interim Response Actions (IRA) were designed and implemented to protect public health, the surrounding community and the environment from Arsenal contamination. Included in the 14 IRAs was the construction and operation of groundwater treatment systems both on and off the site. Today, the five groundwater treatment systems still treat more than 750 million gallons of groundwater each year.

Regulatory Framework

In 1995, intensive public involvement helped the Army, Shell, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reach two monumental decisions. The off-Post Record of Decision (ROD), signed Dec. 19, 1995, and the On-Post ROD, signed on June 11, 1996, provide the framework, purpose and overall rationale for the cleanup actions to be accomplished at the site. To date, more than half of the 31 cleanup projects identified in the on- and off-post RODs are complete. The project is anticipated to be completed by 2010.

Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge

The Service's involvement at the Arsenal began in 1986, when a winter communal roost of bald eagles, then an endangered species, was discovered on site. The Service soon realized that more than 330 species of wildlife species inhabit the Arsenal. including deer, white pelicans and burrowing owls and bison. In 1992, Congress passed the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge Act, which stipulates the site become part of the national wildlife refuge system once cleanup is complete.

In 2004 and again in 2006, a total of 12,000 additional acres (two-thirds of the site) were removed from the Environmental Protection Agency's National Priorities List (Superfund List). This land was transferred from the U.S. Army to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for inclusion into the National Wildlife Refuge System. These land transfers officially established and later expanded the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, one of the largest urban refuges in the country. The Refuge is also one of the largest open spaces in the Denver Metropolitan area and provides environmental education programs, miles of trails, wildlife viewing opportunities and site tours for the public.

For more information about RMA, public participation opportunities and environmental cleanup, please call (303) 289-0136 or call (303) 289-0930 to inquire about site tours, Refuge activities, volunteer opportunities and environmental education programs.