



## Community Window on the Hunters Point Shipyard

### The Hunters Point Shipyard Cleanup: An Overview

#### Introduction

Hunters Point Shipyard (HPS) is located along the San Francisco Bay in the Bayview neighborhood of southeastern San Francisco. HPS was once an active and thriving U.S. Navy base, employing thousands of people. The property is still owned by the U.S. Navy.

In 1991 HPS was designated for closure under the U.S. Department of Defense's Base Realignment and Closure Program. The current plan is to transfer the property to the City and County of San Francisco for redevelopment. However, before the property can be transferred, it must be cleaned up enough to be considered "safe" for the planned reuse.



Image courtesy of U.S. Geological Survey

#### What was the Shipyard used for?

In the 1860's, the first commercial dry dock on the North American Pacific coast was established at Hunters Point. In 1940 the U.S. Navy acquired the property. At that time, the Shipyard was much smaller than what we see today: the Navy increased the land mass of the base by filling parts of San Francisco Bay bordering the Shipyard using crushed rock, dirt, industrial debris, and other waste.

HPS was an active Naval station from 1941 until 1976. During World War II it was primarily used for ship-building, repair, and maintenance activities. Later it was used for submarine servicing and testing.

HPS was also the site of important radiological research by the U.S. military. The Naval Radiological Defense Laboratory (NRDL) operated at HPS from 1946 until 1969. NRDL's mission was to study the effects of nuclear weapons and to develop counter measures. At HPS, the NRDL conducted radioactive laboratory operations, cyclotron operations, animal research, and material storage and processing. NRDL was also responsible for decontaminating and disposing of some of the ships that returned from nuclear weapons tests in the Marshall Islands.

The Shipyard was deactivated in 1974 and leased to a private company from 1976 until 1986, when the Navy began a program to investigate and cleanup HPS. The Naval Facilities Engineering Command Southwest Division currently manages the property.

#### Is the Shipyard contaminated?

Yes, the soil and groundwater at HPS contain chemicals and materials that are considered hazardous to human health and/or the environment. Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), pesticides, petroleum hydrocarbons, solvents, and radiological debris are just some of contaminants that have been found at the Shipyard, and some of the old buildings are known to have lead and asbestos. In 1989 HPS was added to the National Priorities List under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act. By including the Shipyard on the National Priorities List, the federal government was identifying it as a site where hazardous substances are known to have been released into the environment.

#### How did HPS become contaminated?

During the time it was actively used, HPS was home to a wide array of military and industrial activities. Some of the waste from these activities was purposefully released into the environment. For example, some waste was buried in a landfill along the northeastern shore of South Basin. Some of the material was accidentally released into the environment. For example, some materials leaked into the ground from underground storage tanks. When the Shipyard was being actively used, some of the waste was handled in ways that we now know to be unsafe or poor practice. At the time, people did not always know how harmful the materials were to people or how they moved through the soil, groundwater, or air.

#### How serious is the contamination?

The contamination varies across the Shipyard: different areas are contaminated with different materials in different amounts. This is why it is very important for the U.S. Navy to thoroughly investigate the entire Shipyard. Until we know exactly what is there, effective decisions cannot be made about how to cleanup the Shipyard to levels that protect the safety of the people who live and work on or near the Shipyard, now and in the future.

We do know that the soil and groundwater at the Shipyard as well as some of the area neighboring HPS are contaminated by materials such as PCBs, pesticides, petroleum hydrocarbons, solvents, and radiological debris at levels higher than what is allowed by the state or federal government. As more data are

collected and analyzed, we continue to learn more about the contamination at the Shipyard.

### **What is being done to cleanup HPS?**

To accelerate the cleanup of the Shipyard, the Navy divided the Shipyard into six separate parcels (areas) named A through F. Each parcel will have its own cleanup plan. Research is done to find out what each parcel was used for, and groundwater and soil samples are collected and tested for contamination. Once the cleanup plan for a parcel is determined, the cleanup (or "remediation") is started. After the cleanup for an individual parcel is completed, it can be transferred to the City of San Francisco.

The cleanup process is governed by federal regulations, and community input is important. The Navy works with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the California Department of Toxic Substances Control, and the California Regional Water Quality Control Board to decide how the Shipyard should be cleaned up and to what levels. By law the Navy is required to hold community meetings and to involve the community in the cleanup decision-making process.



Image courtesy of Tetra Tech EM Inc./U.S. Navy

### **What does "clean" mean?**

Cleaning up the Shipyard means protecting the current and future health and safety of people who live, work, and play on or near the Shipyard. How clean areas of the Shipyard are at the end of the cleanup process will

determine what those areas can be used for when the Shipyard is redeveloped. If the Shipyard were cleaned up to the highest standards for unrestricted use, then there would be no limitations on how the land could be redeveloped. Alternatively, areas could be cleaned up to specific re-use standards; for example, certain areas might be cleaned up to levels that support future industrial use but not residential use.

### **How long will the cleanup take?**

How long the cleanup takes depends on the type of contamination, what method has been chosen to clean it up, and what is found during the remediation: sometimes, as more is learned about an area during the cleanup, the plan has to be changed.

### **Is it safe for people to be working on the Shipyard?**

Yes, people can work on the Shipyard safely during the cleanup. There are federal and state guidelines for protecting the health and safety of people on hazardous waste sites like HPS. These guidelines are usually explained in the health and safety plan written for each activity and/or area on the Shipyard.

Depending on where someone is on the Shipyard and what they are doing, different precautions must be taken. For example, in some areas the precautions might simply mean people should not dig in an area. In other areas people working on the cleanup might be required to wear special protective clothing, eyewear, and respirators. Anyone working on the Shipyard must be fully informed of the safety guidelines.

### **How can I get more involved?**

Make your voice heard! Get involved with community groups such as Literacy for Environmental Justice or the Community First Coalition. Become a stakeholder in the Yosemite Slough South Basin Restoration Project. Give the Navy your input on how you want the Shipyard cleaned up: attend community meetings and participate in the Restoration Advisory Board.

### **Information Sources**

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), 1994, Public Health Assessment, Naval Station Treasure Island, Hunters Point Annex, San Francisco, California. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.  
[http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/HAC/PHA/treasure/tre\\_toc.html](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/HAC/PHA/treasure/tre_toc.html) (last accessed 02/10/2004).

Naval Facilities Engineering Command Southwest Division, Hunters Point Naval Shipyard.  
<http://www.eafsw.navfac.navy.mil/Environmental/HuntersPoint.htm> (last accessed 02/23/2004).

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2004, Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, California, EPA ID# CA1170090087.  
<http://yosemite.epa.gov/r9/sfund/overview.nsf/0/f8cdc641e5183f068825660b007ee684?OpenDocument> (last accessed 02/10/2004).

### **For More Information, Contact:**

Community Window on the Hunters Point Shipyard Cleanup  
4634 Third Street, San Francisco, CA 94124  
(415) 643-1190 OR (877) WINDOW-8  
<http://www.communitywindowontheshipyard.org>  
[admin@communitywindowontheshipyard.org](mailto:admin@communitywindowontheshipyard.org)

The Community Window on the Hunters Point Shipyard Cleanup is a project of Arc Ecology  
funded by the San Francisco Department of the Environment.

Arc Ecology • 833 Market Street, Suite 1107, San Francisco, CA 94103 • (415) 495-1786

February 2004