Hunters Point Naval Shipyard radiation cleanup standards and USEPA, Region 9, review process

The Hunters Point Naval Shipyard (HPNS) is a former military base in San Francisco, California. It was used by the Navy as a naval submarine and ship repair facility from 1945 until 1974 and was also the site of the Naval Radiological Defense Laboratory from 1948 to 1969. In 1989, U.S. EPA placed the Shipyard on its National Priorities List, which is a list of federal Superfund sites in the United States.

The Navy is the lead agency responsible for the investigation and cleanup of HPNS. As part of the process, EPA and its state regulatory agency partners (the California Department of Public Health and the California Department of Toxic Substances Control) oversee and enforce Navy compliance with the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (commonly called the Superfund law) to ensure the cleanup at HPNS protects human health and the environment. The Navy and regulatory agencies work together to decide how to address the contamination. The Navy also gathers community input through a public process.

EPA uses the best available science to develop guidance for cleaning up sites, such as HPNS, that are contaminated with radioactive materials. EPA's goal for the HPNS cleanup is to ensure that the community is protected from exposure to radiation and that the site can be used for work, recreation, and residential purposes.

EPA assesses the health effects of radiation at a site by calculating the "excess cancer risk" posed by radioactive contamination. Excess cancer risk is the additional probability that a person exposed to contamination will develop cancer over a lifetime. Superfund regulations in the National Contingency Plan have defined the protective range of excess cancer risk as a probability that a person exposed to radioactive and chemical contaminants will have between an additional one in ten thousand and a one in a million chance of developing cancer (technically known as the 10^{-4} to 10^{-6} cancer risk range). When calculating this range, EPA uses assumptions about exposure that are higher than people's actual exposure. This means that EPA overestimates risk to make sure that cleanups are sufficiently protective.

EPA reviews the Navy's cleanup report for each survey unit (small area of land or part of a building) of HPNS using the current version of the EPA risk model to make sure that radiation levels are within the protective 10^{-4} to 10^{-6} cancer risk range. This ensures that any land that is transferred to the City of San Francisco for new use meets appropriate levels for protectiveness with regard to radiation. To provide additional protection, the Navy is installing a protective cover over the whole site. The Navy is also developing a plan, which EPA will review, that ensures the Navy or City will maintain and inspect the cover indefinitely.

EPA's risk models have changed over time as radiation science continues to improve. EPA has incorporated the latest models into its review process to ensure the HPNS cleanup continues to be protective of human health and the environment. EPA has reviewed the Navy's past HPNS cleanup reports, applying the current EPA risk model, and found that the Navy's earlier work had achieved the cleanup level needed to protect human health and the environment.

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