

# Press Release

Region 2 - New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands

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## Blueprint for Future Vieques Cleanup Proposed

Contact: Elizabeth Totman 212-637-3662, [totman.elizabeth@epa.gov](mailto:totman.elizabeth@epa.gov)  
Brenda Reyes 787-977-5869, [reyes.brenda@epa.gov](mailto:reyes.brenda@epa.gov)

(New York, NY – Sept. 27, 2007) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has signed a proposed federal facility inter-agency agreement (FFA) with several agencies and jurisdictions for the cleanup work on the Island of Vieques in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. The proposed agreement is between EPA, the U.S. Department of Navy, U.S. Department of the Interior, and the Commonwealth. The agencies will take input from the public on the agreement for 45 days and make any necessary adjustments before finalizing it.

“Work has been proceeding at the site, but reaching an agreement with all the parties involved is a significant milestone,” said Regional Administrator Alan J. Steinberg. “The federal government agencies and the Commonwealth are on the same page on how we will move forward, and that will undoubtedly help in cleaning up this site to the benefit of all involved.”

The agreement requires that the environmental impacts associated with past and present activities on Vieques be thoroughly investigated and that the appropriate actions are taken in order to protect the surrounding community and the environment. The agreement will facilitate cooperation, exchange of information, and participation of all the parties involved.

“The Department of the Navy is committed to completing the cleanup of Vieques Island to support its intended future uses,” said Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Donald R. Schregardus. “Completion of this Federal Facility Agreement marks a major milestone in

defining the process by which the Navy will work in partnership with EPA, the Department of the Interior, and the Commonwealth to achieve our common goals.”

Carlos W. López Freytes, President of the Puerto Rico Environmental Quality Board, said, “The Agreement represents an achievement for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico because it guarantees the involvement of the Environmental Quality Board, as co-regulators, on the decision-making process of the cleanup. Our agency is truly committed to having an active participation in order to ensure that the concerns of the community of Vieques are addressed, the local regulations are followed and the cleanup is fair and comprehensive.”

Unexploded ordnance and remnants of exploded ordnance, which contain hazardous substances, have been identified in the former range areas of the eastern portion of the Vieques site, as well as in the surrounding waters. Extensive work has been performed to assess the conditions at the Vieques site as a whole, and today’s proposed agreement lays out the process for further investigation and cleanup.

"We are proud to be part of this team of professionals cleaning up lands in Vieques and restoring the natural environment," said Sam Hamilton, Southeast Regional Director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "It is our responsibility to ensure that the refuge is cleared of contaminants and hazards that could pose a threat to wildlife, residents, staff or visitors. We will continue to work with the community and our fellow agencies in this monumental effort."

The U.S. Navy began using Vieques, in conjunction with Roosevelt Roads Naval Station on mainland Puerto Rico, in the early years of World War II, as a base for Allied fleets. Land was acquired in the eastern and western portions of Vieques between 1941 and 1943, with further acquisitions occurring during the late 1940s.

On the western portion of Vieques, the Navy operated an ammunition facility until 1948, when the facility ceased operations. It was reactivated in 1962 until its final closure in 2001. Later in that year, the Navy transferred 3,100 acres to the Department of Interior, 4,000 acres to the Municipality of Vieques, and 800 acres to the Puerto Rico Conservation Trust.

The Navy also managed approximately 14,600 acres on the eastern portion of Vieques, which were used for amphibious training exercises and air-to-ground maneuvers. This portion of the island included a waste explosive detonation range, which was operated for many years in support of its training activities. Military training on the eastern section of Vieques ceased in 2003 when the Navy transferred that portion to the Department of the Interior.

In February 2005, the Vieques Island site was placed on EPA's National Priorities List (NPL), which aims to guide the EPA in determining which sites warrant further investigation. The NPL is a list of the most hazardous waste sites in the country.

For a copy of the proposed agreement, to send comments to EPA about the agreement, or for more information on Vieques, visit <http://www.epa.gov/region02/vieques/>

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290 Broadway, New York, NY 10007-1866 - [www.epa.gov/region2](http://www.epa.gov/region2)