Site Description

Fairchild Air Force Base, located 12 miles west of Spokane, Washington, occupies approximately 4,300 acres of land. The base was established by the Army in 1942 as an aircraft repair depot, a role that remained a component of its mission until 1953. In 1947, the base was transferred to the Air Force's Strategic Air Command with a primary mission of supporting heavy bomber and associated air refueling aircraft. In 1994, Fairchild's bomber mission ended, and the base was realigned to create the largest air refueling wing in the Air Force.

During past base activities, the equivalent of over 4,000 drums of solvents, paint wastes, plating sludge, and related industrial wastes have been disposed at various locations across the base. Investigation of these areas began in 1984 under the Air Force's Installation Restoration Program (IRP). An assessment of the base initially identified four areas of concern, covering approximately 85 acres. Those waste areas consisted of Building 1034's dry well system, two inactive landfills, and a wastewater lagoon system that received stormwater and industrial discharges. On the basis of those four areas, Fairchild was proposed to be placed on the National Priorities List. To date, a total of 39 areas of concern have been identified, including two fire training areas, several spill sites, industrial discharge points, oil/water separators, and stormwater ditches.

Site Responsibility: This site is being addressed through federal actions. The Air Force is the lead agency for the cleanup at Fairchild. The State of
NPL Listing History

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Threats and Contaminants

Media Affected: Groundwater, Soil & Sludges

Groundwater, soil, and sediments are contaminated with volatile organic compounds (VOCs), primarily trichloroethylene (TCE), as well as semi-volatile organic compounds (SVOCs) and inorganic compounds. People who ingest or come into direct contact with contaminated groundwater may suffer adverse health effects. The sand and gravel beneath the site allows contaminants to migrate into the groundwater, as well as allowing contaminated groundwater to migrate across the base and beyond the base boundaries.

Cleanup Progress

To date, formal cleanup action decisions have been made for 28 of Fairchild's 39 sites. Because of the large number of sites at Fairchild, the Air Force elected to group them into four sequenced projects to make the process of investigating them and selecting cleanup actions for them more manageable. The background and current status of the sites composing these projects are discussed in greater detail below.

In 2000, the Air Force completed a five-year review to evaluate the continued protectiveness of its ongoing cleanup actions at the facility. During 2002, an Explanation of Significant Difference and an Institutional Controls Management Plan are expected to be completed to improve the enforceability of institutional controls for cleanup actions across the facility.
Project Area 1
This project consists of the Craig Road Landfill, the primary disposal site for municipal and production wastes produced at Fairchild from 1958 to 1977. An investigation revealed that wastes disposed in the landfill were contaminating groundwater near the site with TCE, including the water supply wells for a mobile home park adjacent to the landfill site. The Air Force provided an alternate water supply to those residents in 1989, and instituted a monitoring program to verify that other water supply wells in the vicinity of the base were not experiencing contamination. In 1991, the Air Force initiated a removal action to capture and treat contaminated groundwater at the site boundary. The Record of Decision (ROD) for this project was signed in February 1993. The Air Force completed a landfill cap and an expansion of the groundwater containment and treatment system in 1995 as part of the cleanup action called for in the ROD. The landfill cap was installed to prevent water from infiltrating the contaminated landfill and transporting contaminants into the groundwater. The groundwater containment and treatment system captures groundwater as it leaves the source areas of the landfill and removes the contamination before returning the water to the aquifer. Operation of the groundwater containment and treatment system as well as long-term monitoring of the groundwater beneath the landfill and the surrounding area are ongoing.

Project Area 2
This project includes seven sites: an old fire training pit, a wastewater lagoon, a drywell, an old landfill, and three fuel spill sites on the flightline. The Record of Decision (ROD) for this project was signed in July 1993. Remedial work is either underway or completed with monitoring at all of the sites except for the wastewater lagoon.

Wastewater Lagoons
The wastewater lagoons historically provided retention and settling for flightline stormwater runoff and industrial waste discharges from floor and shop drains in aircraft maintenance buildings along the flightline. The industrial wastes are now pretreated as needed and discharged to the sanitary
sewer, and the lagoons are used principally for the stormwater treatment. The lagoons discharge to No-Name Ditch, which flows off the base and through neighboring agricultural and residential properties for about a mile before percolating into the ground. Investigation of the site found a plume of TCE in groundwater originating in the immediate area of the lagoons and flowing east under agricultural land beyond the base boundary. In 1995, the Air Force installed a system to capture and treat contaminated groundwater in the area of the base site boundary. Operation of the system is ongoing, as is the monitoring of the plume and of nearby residential water supply wells.

In 2000, the Air Force performed an additional investigation to identify the source of the groundwater contamination, and recovered 30 drums containing a variety of wastes, including TCE. The drums had been buried, possibly in the process of filling a lagoon which had been in that location during the 1950s and 1960s. The Air Force is evaluating additional cleanup alternatives to address both residual contamination in the source area and the off-base portion of the contaminant plume, which currently extends for about a quarter of a mile beyond the base boundary.

Project 3
The third project consists of 20 sites. Investigations conducted for this project found that no contamination existed at twelve of these sites. The Air Force, EPA and the State of Washington made preliminary determinations of no further action for these sites during 1991. The ROD formalizing those determinations of no further action and selecting remedies for the eight sites requiring cleanup was signed in 1995. Of the eight sites, remedial work (including monitoring) has been completed at five sites; all remedial work except ongoing monitoring has been completed at the remaining three sites.

Project 4
This project includes eleven sites at various locations across the base. Several of these sites are associated with oil/water separators, underground storage tanks, and surface water ditches. Through its compliance program, the Air Force has upgraded or removed all of the old oil/water separators and underground storage tanks with which the sites in this project are
associated. This project also encompasses the groundwater investigation currently being conducted along the north edge of the flightline for TCE plumes identified during investigations of several sites from Projects 2 and 3, but which were not attributable to those sites themselves. ROD is scheduled for 2003.

Regional Contacts

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Information pertaining to this site is housed at the following location(s):
Fairchild AFB Environmental Flight (Administrative Record)
92 CES/CEVR
Fairchild AFB, WA 99011

Spokane Falls Community College Library (Information Repository)
West 3410 Fort George Wright Drive
Spokane, WA 99224