
Depot research facility to close early

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Approximately 130 federal employees at the Deseret Chemical Depot's Chemical Agent Disposal System (CAMDS) learned Tuesday they may be out of work one year earlier than expected.

Officials from the U.S. Army's Chemical Material Agency (CMA) told depot workers at a town hall meeting that the goal was to close down operations at CAMDS as soon as October 2007. CAMDS, which opened in 1972 as a research and testing facility for the Army's chemical weapons destruction program, saw its mission changed in recent years to the segregation and re-packaging of secondary waste such as contaminated tools and containers prior to destruction. Part of that revised mission was to prepare the facility for closure.

"We've known for years that we were working to put ourselves out of a job," said Greg Mahall, spokesman for CMA. Mahall said the facility is now scheduled to be torn down by October of next year and the Army hopes to close the books on the operation no later than October 2008. The Army's CMA headquarters is at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland.

Deseret Chemical Depot is located about 22 miles south of Tooele and features two main operations & the Chemical Agent Disposal System (CAMDS) and the Tooele Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (TOCDF).

TOCDF is a larger facility and is mostly run by private contractor EG&G and other private contractors. About 1,000 people work at TOCDF where they are in the process of destroying large containers of mustard agent stored on the depot in igloos since the 1940s. Work there, which may include dismantling of the entire facility, should continue until 2012.

The smaller CAMDS operation is situated about 1.5 miles south of TOCDF.

"We talked about voluntary early retirement, voluntary separation incentive pay and looking at the possibility of employees relocating," Mahall said. "These workers are highly-skilled and we could use some of that expertise in similar operations in Kentucky and Colorado. We thought it was a very good meeting with workers, not contentious. We're now facing the reality of closure."

Director of operations at CAMDS, Gregory St. Pierre, paid tribute to the workforce.

"We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to these workers who, over the life of the facility, have made great contributions to our nation and were instrumental in the research and development of chemical demilitarization technologies currently in use throughout the nation," St. Pierre said. "The legacy is one we can all be proud of."

The Tennessee Valley Authority, a federal government energy agency, will coordinate the closure of CAMDS. The authority helped close the Rocky Mountain Arsenal outside Denver and recently completed the closure of a former VX nerve agent production facility at the Newport Chemical Depot in Indiana.

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