

Bunkers Needed for Explosives After Evacuation

HOLBROOK MOHR, Associated Press

Authorities say they have run out of bunkers at a Louisiana military base for some of the millions of pounds of explosives that prompted a town's evacuation after the material was found haphazardly stored.

Sheriff Gary Sexton in Louisiana's Webster Parish told The Associated Press on Thursday that authorities are searching for more bunker space to store the military propellant M6, which is used in artillery shells. He said the material may have to be moved out of state.

Authorities have already moved more than 6 million pounds of explosives after an explosion in October triggered an investigation of Explo Systems Inc., an explosives recycling company with a contract to demilitarize the material.

Explo Systems rents space for its business at Camp Minden, a sprawling Louisiana National Guard base.

A nearby town of about 800 people called Doyline was evacuated for nearly a week in December because authorities feared any explosion could trigger a massive chain reaction blast. Doyline is about 25 miles east of Shreveport.

Louisiana State Police spokesman Matt Harris said Thursday that officials don't want to speculate on just how much more material needs a proper storage facility, but it's enough that more bunkers are needed.

Sexton said the remaining material can still be packaged for sale, but recent stormy weather has hindered efforts to make sure it is properly contained or removed.

State police spokeswoman Julie Lewis has said the materials found outside at the facility appeared to have been "hidden" outside buildings among the trees at the sprawling base.

Explo Systems officials haven't responded to numerous messages seeking comment since the investigation began. An attorney who represented the company in the past declined to comment when a reporter visited his office in Shreveport.

The Army awarded Explo Systems a contract in 2010 to demilitarize hundreds of thousands of propelling charges for artillery rounds. The contract was for \$2.9 million with options for renewal for four years. The contract called for the demilitarization of as many as 450,000 propelling charges per year. Demilitarizing explosives generally entails changing a device or chemical in a way that it can't be used for its originally intended purposes.

Stephen Abney, a spokesman for the Army's Joint Munitions Command, has said

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Explo requested on Nov. 27 that the government hold all shipments because Louisiana authorities would not allow them to receive it until inspections and investigations have been completed.

Lt. Col. Michael Kazmierzak, a Louisiana National Guard spokesman, has said Explo officials asked early last year to lease more space at the base but that the request was turned down because the company was roughly \$400,000 behind on rent. He said the company never again brought up the need for more space, but worked out a plan to pay back rent.

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