

Officials aim for Memorial Day beach opening

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BY NICHOLAS HUBA
STAFF WRITER

SURF CITY — Federal officials say they are going to try their best to make sure that a section of the beach where World War II ordnance was found is opened by Memorial Day.

"We are going to work as fast as possible to make sure that this happens," said Keith Watson, project director for the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. "But at this time we cannot guarantee that."

"Hopefully we will find few items, that is the best-case scenario at this time," Watson said.

The beach replenishment project that was being performed in the area was stopped the week of March 2 after items were found on the beach.

On March 2, Surf City police informed the corps' on-site Long Beach Island project staff that a private citizen with a metal detector had found potential unexploded ordnance in the form of projectiles buried in the beachfill between 17th and 24th streets in Surf City.

The borough police contacted the Ocean County K-9 bomb squad, State Police and the 177th Air National Guard ordnance staff. The 177th in turn called in Fort Dix's 54th Bomb Disposal Unit.

Bomb disposal specialists from the 54th walked the beach, found more unexploded ordnance and identified both as fuses for World War II-era ordnance. The fuses are 1 to 2 inches in diameter and 9 inches long. They still contain powder, but this type of fuse would need to be struck to activate. Both fuses have been removed for proper disposal. During the weekend of March 3, residents found two more fuses, and last Monday a representative of the contractor, Weeks Marine Inc., found a fifth fuse in the vicinity of 22nd Street.

The Corps contacted the New Jersey State Police Regional Operations and Intelligence Center to report the new finds and contacted ordnance specialists at Fort Monmouth to get a further assessment of the area. State Police took the three fuses off site for disposal.

Watson said the corps is currently in negotiations with contractors to start completely going over the area.

"I cannot go into many of the specifics but we are trying our best to make sure that we get someone out there at this time," Watson said.

There are guards stationed at the beaches that were affected by the ordnance and safety fences have been placed at all street ends and along the boundaries of the project.

New Jersey's U.S. senators will ask the corps to try to expedite the cleanup of the beaches where the potentially explosive, World War II military fuses were found, state Sen. Leonard Connors said Friday.

"I am for it, to have the beaches open a week before Memorial Day," said Connors, who is also mayor of Surf City.

Connors said Sens. Frank Lautenberg and Robert Menendez, both Democrats, had a staffer inform Connors, a Republican, of their efforts.

"They want that project stepped up," Connors said of the replenishment that has set off a number of local disputes over post-project easements to allow people access to the beaches.

While the section of the beach is closed, representatives of the Weeks Marine, the contractor for the project, are putting the finishing touches on the rest of the beach fill project.

"Right now they are doing all of the walkovers and handicapped ramps that need to be done," Watson said.

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