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Price tag for cleanup: \$360,000

EPA believes Navy partly responsible for cache near chip plant

By Larry Rulison

Malta

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency believes the Navy may share responsibility for a large cache of metal drums

and potential explosives found buried near the GlobalFoundries computer chip factory back in 2016.

The June 2016 discovery of the nearly 100 containers, including 34 suspicious stainless steel canisters, caused a minor stir at the factory, which is home to 3,000 workers.

Documents obtained this week by the Times Union reveal

that the EPA spent \$360,000 to unearth and dispose of the drums and canisters, which were suspected of containing hazardous and potentially explosive chemicals. That's because the discovery was located on a former government missile and space rocket testing site that dates back to the Cold War.

Now the EPA is trying to recover the costs of the 2016 cleanup operation from the government agencies and contractors that worked on the site decades ago — although the U.S. Navy appears to be the main suspect.

When the EPA first notified the public of the discovery of the buried containers back in 2016, it said it believed the 34 metal canisters were used to take "quality assurance samples" back in the days the missile testing site was operational.

Known as the Malta Rocket Fuel Area, the 165-acre site in the middle of what is known as Luther Forest was used by the federal government to take Nazi rocket technology seized by the Allies in World War II to launch the U.S. space program and new weapons systems used to deter

Please see **DRUMS D7** ▶

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▶ CONTINUED FROM D6

the Soviet Union.

In 1987, the property was named to the EPA's list of polluted Superfund sites across the country that were targeted for cleanup.

General Electric Co. and other firms that ran the site for the Defense Department agreed to pay for and manage the cleanup, which paved the way for the creation of the Luther Forest Technology Campus on more than 1,000 acres located around the test site.

Others who agreed to shoulder the cleanup costs include Mechanical Technology, a little-known GE spinoff that is located in Albany, as well as NASA, the Army and the Air Force.

GlobalFoundries began building its Fab 8 factory at Luther Forest in 2009, and the computer chip maker has invested \$15 billion since then in several expansions and additions.

A second factory could be built in the coming years, fueled ironically by hundreds of millions of dollars in new chip orders from the U.S. military.

Documents provided this week by the EPA to the Times Union show that the 34 metal canisters that were destroyed actually had U.S. Navy markings.

"The U.S. Navy was contacted about the cylinders at the time of the discovery but declined to assist with the investigation and disposal tasks," a Dec. 19, 2019 letter sent by the EPA to the Navy and others states. "Because

the Navy cylinders had markings indicating the possible presence of explosive contents, the cylinders were destroyed on-site, with EPA oversight, by controlled detonation in a remote area."

Both GE and Mechanical Technology, which makes testing equipment used to calibrate airplane systems and other devices, told the Times Union they do not believe they had anything to do with the dumped containers and have informed the EPA as well.

The Navy did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Edison Tech Center in Schenectady notes that the Navy did extensive rocket testing at the Malta test site for Project Vanguard, which sent the first U.S. satellite into orbit in the late 1950s.