

# **Environmental Health Fact Sheet**

## **Former Dakota County Nike Airbase Site April 1997**

*This fact sheet provides general information about the public health issues associated with the Former Dakota County Nike Airbase -- for people living near the site and other interested people. It does not provide a comprehensive discussion of all available technical information about the site, or of all health issues related to the site. More detailed information can be found in reports which are available from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH).*

### **Site description and history**

The former Dakota County Nike Airbase is located at 1462 260th Street approximately 7 miles southeast of Farmington, Minnesota and 30 miles south of downtown St. Paul (see map). The former airbase is located in a predominately rural area with agricultural activity on the outskirts of the Minneapolis/St. Paul Metropolitan area. The Dakota County Nike Airbase was constructed in 1959 in order to intercept high flying enemy aircraft with Nike Missiles armed with single nuclear warheads. The airbase is one of four constructed to defend the Twin Cities. The battery control area (radar, guidance, electronic and communication systems) for the Dakota County Airbase was located approximately 1 mile northwest of the airbase and is not discussed in this report. The base closed in the 1972 and in 1973 the U.S. Bureau of Mines (USBM) received ownership and used the base as a research center until it closed in 1995.

The base is enclosed by a chain link fence with barbed wire strung above it. A communications tower used by the Minnesota Department of Transportation is located on the base. The base is occasionally used by the Sheriff's Department for training. Two or three hundred yards south of the enclosed base is the unenclosed former waste water treatment plant (WWTP) used by the U.S. Army. The USBM intends to sell the property. Future site use is unknown.

### **What contaminants have been detected at the site and where were they found?**

Metallic mercury was discovered in one of the structures at the former WWTP by an off road cyclist in the Spring of 1996. The source of the mercury was a leaking bearing for an old filtration device. The spill was reported to state authorities who then contacted Dakota County Environmental Management. Dakota County staff visited the site, collected and properly disposed of approximately 25 milliliters of visible mercury droplets. The County contacted the Bureau of Mines who, along with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, completed a thorough investigation for mercury in nearby soil and groundwater. A thorough clean-up of the mercury spill is being conducted and is scheduled to be completed in the Spring of 1997.

In addition to the mercury spill investigation and cleanup at the WWTP, a comprehensive environmental investigation of the whole complex has been conducted by the Bureau of Mines in preparation for selling the property. Soil and groundwater were sampled in those areas on the main complex and the WWTP where contamination was most likely. Little or no contamination was detected.

**Are there any health hazards from the site?**

MDH concluded there are no health hazards to those individuals living near the complex.

MDH did conclude that individuals in buildings on the main complex may be exposed to lead, from lead paint, and exposed asbestos. Depending on the future use of these buildings, restoration of these buildings may need to be conducted to ensure occupants are not exposed to unsafe concentration of lead or asbestos. In addition, physical hazards exists at the WWTP because of the poor condition of these structures. Structures at the WWTP have been secured to restrict access until their removal in the Spring of 1997.

The small amounts of contaminants detected in groundwater at both the main complex and the

WWTP are well below levels of health concern. In addition, the nearest drinking water wells are likely to be residential wells approximately a half mile or greater from the site. A thorough investigation of the site reveals these residential wells are not impacted by the low levels of contamination detected on-site.

While nuclear warheads were stored at the airbase during its operation, residual radioactivity does not represent a health hazard. Radioactivity was monitored during base operation and no instances of radioactive leaks were reported. Radioactive material was properly removed upon base closure.

### **What is being done at the site?**

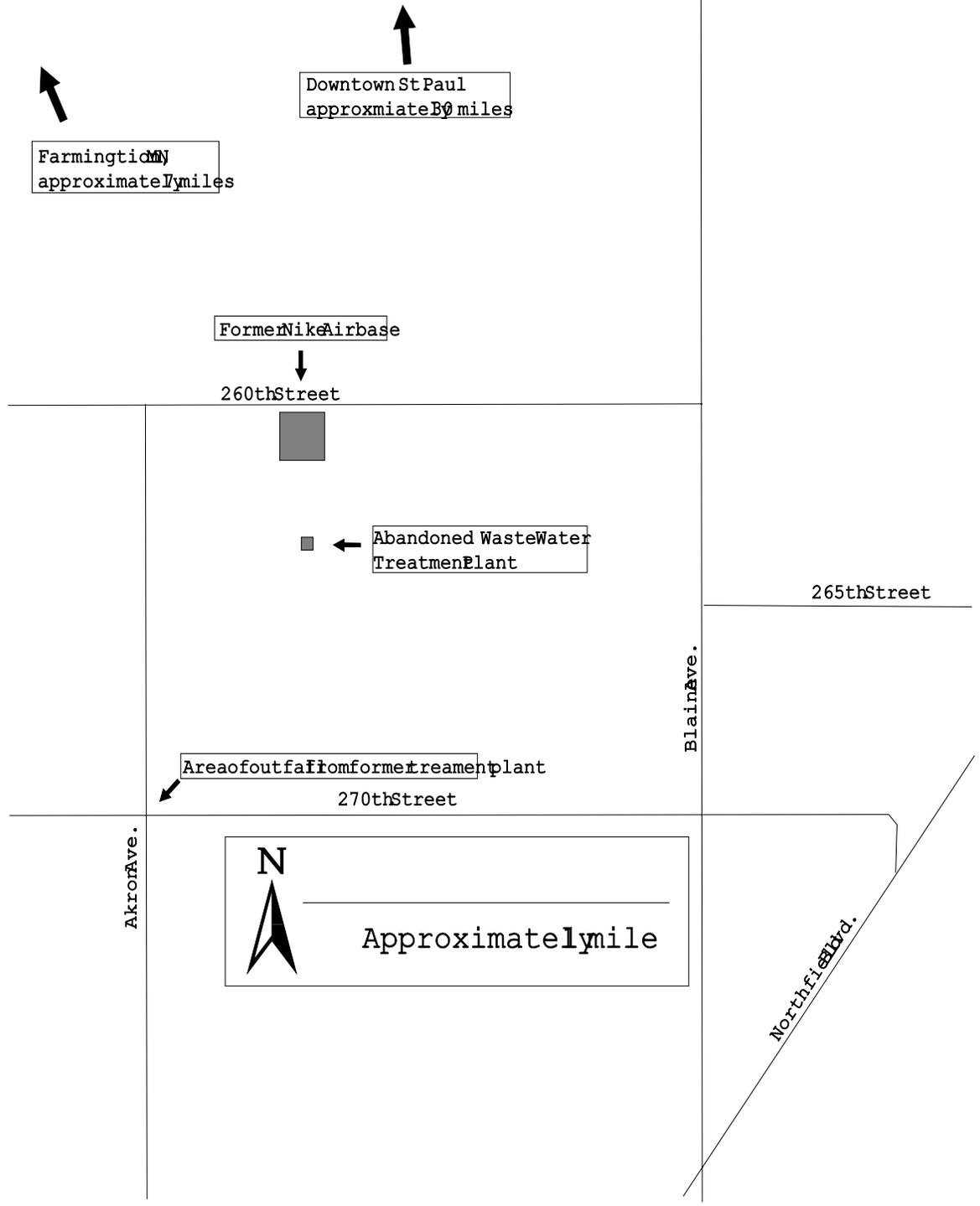
The site investigation is being reviewed with the assistance of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Voluntary Investigation and Cleanup program before the site is sold. Future use of the site will be considered as part of this review. The portion of the site that includes the former WWTP is also being addressed under the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Formerly Used Defense Sites cleanup program.

The WWTP plant is being razed and those areas where elevated mercury levels have been detected in soils will be disposed of in the Spring of 1997. No health concerns related to the chemical contaminants currently exists at the WWTP. The potential physical hazards and soils with elevated mercury levels will be removed in the Spring of 1997.

*Public health documents related the Former Dakota County Nike Airbase are available from MDH. To request copies, or for additional information about the site, call Lisa Pogoff at 612/627-5415. Other knowledgeable individuals involved with the site include: Bill Freischel, Dakota County Environmental Management (612/891-7547), Howard Dahlby, U.S. Bureau of Mines (612/725-0737 ext. 4505, and Bob Dempsey, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (612/290-5443).*

*To request this document in another format, call 612/627-5100  
TDD: Minn. Relay Service 297-5353 or Toll Free 1/800/627-3529*

# Former Dakota County Nike Airbase and Surrounding Area\*



\* Map Derived from USGS Quadrangle Map, 1974