

County Commission Update: Marking an Historic Accomplishment

By Wade Mathews, Public Information Officer

I can't believe it's here. I've been looking forward to this since I began working for Tooele County Emergency Management almost 12 years ago. At that time it seemed like this time would never come. I'm talking about the total destruction of the chemical munitions once stored at Deseret Chemical Depot (DCD). Those munitions and containers that were filled with chemical agent are completely destroyed. Tooele County is no longer home to 44 percent of the nation's stockpile of chemical weapons.

Eight months ago, I wrote in this publication about the great work that was being done at DCD and the Tooele Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (TOCDF) when the supposedly last container was delivered to the large demilitarization plant. I knew we were close then, but all the military and contract workers at DCD crossed the finish line on January 21st when the last drop of agent was burned up in the Area 10 Liquid Incinerator. They did have to change their plans and continue utilizing the TOCDF to complete the mission, but that's irrelevant in the long run.

On January 31st, the Tooele County Commissioners, along with TCEM, and federal and state representatives, received official notice from Colonel Mark B. Pomeroy and other officials at DCD that there was no agent left there. Commissioner Jerry Hurst said about the occasion, "It's been a great cooperative project; communications between DCD and the county have been great. They have always kept us in the loop so we knew what was going on and could report to our constituents. The safety record at DCD has been phenomenal. What few problems that occurred out there were taken care of quickly and effectively. It's great to have this all done as safely as it was."

Tooele County Emergency Management Director, Kari Sagers, expressed her appreciation to DCD officials for the partnership that has existed. She said, "The communication and cooperation that existed was beneficial to the entire community. There was always open dialogue and two-way communications between partners. We could always count on DCD to keep us informed of the situation there, so that we could notify the public of any threatening emergencies in a timely manner. Fortunately, none ever occurred."

Tooele County will continue to benefit from the partnership Commissioner Colleen Johnson said. "DCD and the whole county need to be proud of the accomplishment of making the county and the nation safer, by destroying all of the munitions there. I think the whole thing has been a great benefit to our county with the emergency preparedness capabilities we've gained for all hazards and emergencies. The county and cities have benefited from the experience and what we have learned. Everyone has worked together for the same goal. Now

we have that working relationship from training and exercising together that will remain afterwards,” Johnson said.

To express their recognition of the historic feat and thanks for a job well done, the County Commissioners sent a letter to DCD’s commander. An excerpt of that letter is included here.

On this historic occasion, we the Tooele County Commissioners want to take this opportunity to congratulate you and your workforce for the safe completion of Deseret Chemical Depot’s mission – the total elimination of the chemical weapons stockpile stored in Tooele County since 1941. On behalf of all of Tooele County’s citizens, we thank you for accomplishing this critical task.

Looking back over the 23-year partnership Tooele County has had with the Army and DCD, we appreciate your cooperation, your candor, and your open communications with us. We know both partners have benefited through joint efforts to create an environment that was and is prepared for not only a chemical emergency, but for all hazards.

Since 1989, when Tooele County first became part of the Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program, this community has worked together to plan, train and exercise for an emergency at DCD that never happened. We’re grateful for that. We’re also grateful for the legacy CSEPP leaves behind – a better prepared community for all-hazards.

Although the decades-long risk from the hazardous agents stored and destroyed at DCD is eliminated, Tooele County will remain prepared and vigilant. We are glad to maintain the infrastructure provided by CSEPP and managed by Emergency Management.

Thank you for making Tooele County, this state, our great nation, and even the world safer. We wish all the best for you and your employees who have worked so hard to this end.

Hundreds of workers at DCD and the TOCDF, many of them Tooele County citizens, have worked with the same goal of safely storing and eliminating the chemical agent. Within two years each one of them will have retired or had to find new employment. I join with the Commissioners in hoping for the best for each of them.

I think the county would be remiss if it didn’t recognize and thank all of the people over the decades who have worked at DCD and Tooele Army Depot, which previously had stewardship of the chemical storage area then known as South Area. My own dad, Terry, worked at and retired from Tooele Army Depot. As an engineer he helped design the TOCDF. I’m proud of him for that. Many other men and women in the past contributed to the success of today’s DCD workforce.

Thanks to everyone involved, past and present, for a safer, and better prepared Tooele County.