



First GB Nerve Agent Rocket Destroyed at Kentucky Plant

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BLUE GRASS ARMY DEPOT, Ky. – The first M55 rocket containing GB nerve agent was destroyed at the [Blue Grass Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant](#) (BGCAPP) July 6.

“The GB rockets are the last type of chemical weapons to be destroyed at the Blue Grass Army Depot,” said Dr. Candace Coyle, BGCAPP site project manager. “We are committed to safely eliminating the remaining U.S. chemical weapons stockpile by 2023 and then safely closing the plant.”

The M55 rockets containing GB nerve agent represent more than 50% of the original [chemical weapons](#) stockpile safely stored at the [Blue Grass Army Depot](#) (BGAD). Initially, five different kinds of chemical agent-filled weapons were stored at BGAD: 155mm projectiles containing mustard agent, 155mm projectiles containing VX nerve agent, 8-inch projectiles containing GB nerve agent, M55 rockets containing VX nerve agent and M55 rockets containing GB nerve agent.

Chemical weapons destruction operations began at BGCAPP on June 7, 2019. Trained operators have overseen the safe destruction of 246.7 U.S. tons of chemical agent. A total of 276.6 U.S. tons of chemical agent remains to be destroyed in Kentucky.

(more)

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Reactions:

"Our constant theme throughout every campaign has been 'safety' and it will remain our theme as we destroy rockets containing GB nerve agent," said Ron Hink, [Bechtel Parsons Blue Grass](#) (BPBG) project manager. "Our Blue Grass team is ready to finish our mission of destroying every chemical weapon stored in Kentucky."

"I'm proud of the chemical demilitarization work completed by the BGCAPP team, which operates hand-in-hand with the depot's supporting structure and environmental compliance offices," said Col. Stephen Dorris, BGAD commander. "The safe completion of four of the five chemical surety material campaigns in just three years is truly noteworthy. It's amazing to think that the GB rocket campaign is all that's left to safely neutralize after so many years of hard work safely storing and securing the various GB, VX, and mustard agent material. These next several months will undoubtedly be filled with challenges, but I'm confident in the ability of the dedicated professionals Team BGAD has working to complete this very important mission. Following the completion of this important chemical surety mission, the depot remains postured to continue its daily lethal and non-lethal, material support mission to the Joint Warfighter. The depot was here long before chemical surety material was ever moved here, and we plan to continue the receipt, storage, maintenance, shipment and demilitarization of conventional munitions and material for many years into the future."

"Blue Grass Chemical Activity is proud to support BGCAPP in the destruction of the GB rocket stockpile, the final chemical weapons campaign," said Lt. Col. Tyler McKee, Blue Grass Chemical Activity commander. "The entire Blue Grass Chemical Activity workforce is prepared to enthusiastically and safely support this historic effort."

"They really are starting on destroying the last chemical weapons in the U.S. stockpile," said Dr. Doug Hindman, Kentucky Chemical Demilitarization Citizens' Advisory Commission chair. "That's an achievement we've all worked toward for years. Once they finish, safely, America will be totally free of stored chemical weapons."

Background:

Under the observation of trained operators, automated equipment will disassemble more than 51,000 rockets and drain the chemical agent. The agent will be [neutralized](#) by mixing it with water and caustic to produce hydrolysate. After the agent is confirmed destroyed, the hydrolysate will be pumped to holding tanks. From there, the hydrolysate will be [safely shipped](#) via tanker trucks and further processed at Veolia Environmental Services in Texas.

The drained rocket warheads will be containerized and placed in temporary storage at BGAD. Marked as secondary waste, they will be destroyed in a [Static Detonation Chamber](#) (SDC) unit located at BGCAPP. Full rockets that have leaked in the past and been overpacked will also be destroyed in an SDC at BGCAPP. The non-contaminated rocket motors will be shipped to Anniston, Alabama, to be destroyed in an SDC.

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The [Program Executive Office, Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternatives](#) is responsible for destroying the remaining U.S. chemical weapons stockpile in [Colorado](#) and Kentucky. The organization oversees the contract for design, construction, systemization, operation and closure of BGCAPP with BPBG and teaming partners Amentum, Battelle Memorial Institute and GP Strategies. The project also works closely with [community advisory groups](#) to keep them informed about chemical weapons destruction progress.

The chemical weapons stockpile at the depot originally consisted of 523 U.S. tons of chemical agent. In June 2019, the BGCAPP team began destroying more than 15,000 155mm projectiles containing mustard agent using an SDC. The mustard agent destruction campaign completed in September 2021. A “campaign” refers to destruction of a particular type of chemical munition. From January through May 2020, nearly 4,000 8-inch projectiles containing GB nerve agent were destroyed at BGCAPP. From January through May 2021, nearly 13,000 155mm projectiles containing VX nerve agent were destroyed. From July 2021 through April 2022, more than 17,000 M55 rockets containing VX nerve agent were destroyed.

The stockpile sites in Colorado and Kentucky account for the last 10% of what was originally a national stockpile of more than 30,000 tons of chemical weapons. The [U.S. Army Chemical Materials Activity](#) (then Agency) destroyed the initial 90%, which was stored at seven other sites across the U.S. and on Johnston Atoll in the Pacific. Chemical weapons destruction in Colorado began in 2015.

Both sites are on target to complete destruction of the chemical weapons stockpile by the Chemical Weapons Convention treaty commitment of Sept. 30, 2023, and before the congressional deadline of Dec. 31, 2023. After chemical weapons destruction operations are completed, the closure phase will continue beyond that time for an additional three to four years. BGAD will continue its conventional weapons missions beyond the BGCAPP closure phase.

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Photo caption: Blue Grass Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant operators place the first M55 rocket containing GB nerve agent on a conveyor to begin the destruction process July 6, 2022. The GB nerve agent M55 rockets are the last type of chemical weapons to be destroyed in Kentucky. (U.S. Army photo)