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Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville
P.O. 1600
Huntsville, AL 35807-4301

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Former UAH grad helping installations in the removal of munitions using digital geophysical mapping

By Jenny Stripling
Public Affairs Specialist
U.S. Army Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville

With the help of new technology, removal of munitions items on former World War II training sites have become faster and cheaper. Clearance work that previously took an estimated seven months has been reduced to a rapid three weeks, saving taxpayers \$3.5 million in expenditures.

One UAH graduate is making a difference in how the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers collects geophysical data.

Bill Noel, a 1998 graduate who works for the Ordnance & Explosives Design Center at the U.S. Army Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville, used Digital Geophysical Mapping (DGM) to save time and money at the former Raritan Arsenal, N.J. “We don’t design ordnance or explosives. What we do is manage the cleanup of ordnance at old military sites as well as active bases,” Noel said.

Most of the sites are former World War II training bases that used to be remote but now are being redeveloped as residential areas, industrial parks and shopping centers so the possibility of finding buried ordnance is a public safety issue.

“It’s a challenge because we have to juggle so many factors,” said Noel. “We have to learn about new technologies coming in to enable us to do a better characterization of the site and the challenges of adopting those new technologies into our processes so that we can get the best results.”

The former Raritan Arsenal was used by the Army from 1917 to 1963 to store and process munitions and to ship them to and from Europe. The opportunity to use new technology came in former marshland beside the Raritan River. Over time munitions were dumped or spilled in the river during ship loading operations. Dredging to keep the river deep enough for ships to pass moved large volumes of sediment ashore that included the munitions.

This is where DGM came into the picture.

One year ago the last 107-acre portion of the site was mapped using digital geophysics. Specific locations for 3,129 single anomalies distributed across 57 acres were GPS pinpointed with an accuracy of 10 centimeters.

Public Affairs: 256.895.1235
Fax: 256.895.1689

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