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STORAGE OF TOXINS DEFENDED BY ARMY

Research Is Not Viewed as Violating '70 Nixon Order

EDGEWOOD, Md., Oct. 19 (AP) — Army officials contend that the storage of eight deadly toxins left over from biological warfare research does not violate the intent of a Presidential order in 1970 to dispose of all such substances.

According to an Army spokesman at Edgewood Arsenal, the order in February, 1970, by President Nixon pertained only to offensive biological and chemical warfare materials. The spokesman said that the six samples here and two at Dugway Proving Grounds in Utah had been preserved because they were being used "to research defensive weapons systems."

NBC News disclosed over the weekend that the Army continued to store the toxins, which include a variety of Hawaiian coral maintained in large enough quantities to kill 2,000 people. The Army is also storing several strains of snake venom.

"The Army says it may need these items for future research," the network reported. "In addition, the Army is studying nearly 100 different disease organisms which a potential enemy might use to attack the United States."

The Edgewood spokesman said that the storage of the toxins was in "keeping with Edgewood's mission in the U. S. Army." He said that "the facility is charged with developing effective defensive weapons systems."

In September, a Pentagon spokesman, Lieut. Col. Hugh C. Wait, confirmed that the Army had retained a small quantity of deadly shellfish toxin identical to that which was found in a Central Intelligence Agency laboratory. He said the shellfish toxin was being kept for "laboratory purposes" and did not violate the Presidential order.

In an interview before the disclosure of the storage of the eight toxins, Dr. E. L. Harris, the technical director at Edgewood, said that the Army would be within the spirit of the Presidential order by keeping small amounts of toxins.

He, too, cited a provision in that order that said the United States "should confine its military program for toxins to research for defensive purposes only."