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Storing 8 toxins didn't violate order

EDGEWOOD, Md. (AP)— U.S. 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 the six samples here and two at Dugway Proving Grounds in Utah were preserved because they were being used to research defensive weapons systems.

NBC News disclosed over the weekend that the Army continues to store the toxins, which includes a variety of Hawaiian coral maintained in large enough quantities to kill two thousand people. The Army also is 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 200 different disease organisms which a potential enemy might use to attack the United States," the network reported.

The spokesman from Edgewood said the storage of the toxins is in keeping with Edgewood's mission in the U.S. Army. "The facility is charged with

developing effective defensive weapons systems," he said.

In September, a Pentagon spokesman, Lt. Col. Hugh C. Wait, confirmed that the Army retained a small quantity of deadly shellfish toxin identical to that which was found in a CIA laboratory.

At that time, the spokesman said the shellfish toxin was being kept for "laboratory purposes" and thus did not violate the presidential order.

In an interview prior to the disclosure of the latest toxins, Dr. E. L. Harris, the technical director at Edgewood, said 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 which said the United States "should confine its military program for toxins to research for defensive purposes only."