

Star telegram

Residents say ^{B1} plan inadequate ^{11/2/02}

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM

ARLINGTON — The outdoors has been mostly off-limits to Jonathon and Kristi Williamson's children since small military practice bombs began turning up in yards of their south Arlington neighborhood last year.

"We got them a new swing set, and basically it sat there and rusted. We had to take it down and throw it away," said Jonathon Williamson, who found parts of one World War II-era practice bomb in his

CORPS The Army Corps of Engineers expects to begin digging up practice bombs next year in the Southridge Hills subdivision.

back yard. "The only things we have out there now are three dogs and a dog house."

But like others in the Southridge Hills subdivision, which was built atop a former Navy practice bombing range, the Williamsons' reaction is mixed over a preliminary

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decision to dig up and remove bombs.

The Army Corps of Engineers recently budgeted \$500,000 to begin clearing the practice bombs next year from open areas but not bombs buried beneath homes. The corps expects to finalize its decision in the next two or three months, officials said.

"Our expectation is that we're not going to find anything," said Brian Condikey, the corps' project manager for the cleanup. "But we're doing everything we can to allay those concerns and fears."

Corps officials say the bombs contain only small amounts of explosives — about as much as in a shotgun shell — intended to trigger on impact and disperse powder to mark the site for pilots to see.

Someone setting off an unexploded bomb could be injured by flying dirt or stones, Condikey said.

But in the unlikely event

that a settling foundation triggered a bomb, "you wouldn't hear it, you wouldn't feel it, and it wouldn't cause any damage," he said.

However, "If the bombs are under the houses, that still doesn't comfort me," Kristi Williamson said. "A bomb is never a safe thing, I don't care what the experts say."

The corps this week began taking soil samples to determine whether the deteriorating bombs have released enough zinc, lead or explosives to require removal or treating of the soil. Several residents have blamed possible contamination for a variety of medical symptoms, including dizziness and rashes.

Construction on the 590-lot neighborhood began several years ago at Matlock and Harris roads, the site of the former Five Points Outlying Field. The practice bombing range closed in the 1950s, and the land has changed ownership several times.

The controversy has spawned at least seven lawsuits accusing builder KB Home of not alerting residents

to the bombs before they bought their homes. Several suits demand that KB Home buy back the residents' homes.

KB Home has insisted the disclosure was included in purchase-closing documents.

The most recent suit, filed Tuesday in a Fort Worth state district court by four families, is the first to include the Army Corps of Engineers as a defendant. Condikey declined comment on the lawsuit, saying that he has not reviewed it.

Corps officials say the bombs would be harmless under a concrete-slab foundation. But some parents say they would still feel uneasy, even though their children would be allowed to play in their yards again.

That doesn't mean there couldn't be health hazards, said Roger Critz, who has lived a block away from Southridge for more than a year. "That's unacceptable. If it's underneath the house, who's to say it's not going to leak out stuff and get into the yards?"

His wife, Shelley, said she has been suffering severe

Former bombing range

The Army Corps of Engineers is expected to begin digging up World War II-era practice bombs in the Southridge Hills subdivision next year.



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headaches and seizures that she believes are linked to bomb contaminants.

Condikey said the results of the soil testing should be known by the end of February. The bomb removal, if the agency gives its final approval, would proceed regardless of those test results, he said.

"If the bombs are under the houses, that still doesn't comfort me. A bomb is never a safe thing. I don't care what the experts say."

— Kristi Williamson, Arlington resident