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Cleanup halted on Stryker complex

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Cultural concerns are halting work on unexploded ordnance cleanup at the site of a future Stryker brigade training range at Schofield Barracks.

On July 22, an unexploded ordnance crew bulldozed across a buffer protecting the Hale'au'au heiau, cultural monitors said.

"The debris was pushed only a few meters away from the slope where the highly sensitive Hale'au'au heiau is located," Kamo'a Quitevis said in an e-mail sent to Army, state and federal officials.

Cultural access had been allowed at set times, but because of the limited access, the fencing breach occurred when no monitors were present, and it was unclear if any surface or subsurface cultural sites were impacted, Quitevis said.

Work at the site stopped last week after cultural monitors raised concerns that they were being excluded from the process.

It's not the first setback for the planned Battle Area Complex for Stryker vehicle driving and firing.

The Army in January said depleted uranium from 15 training rounds used in the 1960s was found during a cleanup of unexploded ordnance.

A month later, the Army said chemical weapons that included chloropicrin, an asphyxiator used in World War I, were located at the range.

Troy Griffin, a Schofield spokesman, yesterday said the unexploded ordnance work was stopped "because of increasing concerns by the cultural monitors."

"Until we can come up with answers to their concerns, we've ceased operations out there," Griffin said. Because of the danger posed by what's in the ground, the unexploded ordnance crews determined that it was necessary to limit cultural monitoring, he said.

According to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Army in 2004 agreed to work closely with Native Hawaiian organizations and provide cultural monitors access and timely notification of Stryker brigade projects.

On Mondays and Tuesdays, 45 minutes were allowed for monitoring, beginning at 5:30 a.m.; 30 minutes during a lunch break for the unexploded ordnance crew; and 45 minutes beginning at about 4:15 p.m.

In a July 25 letter, the advisory council said the "strong criticism" by Hawaiian organizations over the way the 2004 agreement was being implemented was a growing concern, and suggested projects were being carried out without safeguards to ensure participation by the groups.

In an e-mail the day before, Lance M. Foster, director of Native Rights, Land and Culture for the Office of Hawaiian Affairs said, "I think we need to look at litigation at this point."

The group DMZ-Hawai'i/Aloha 'Aina yesterday called on the Army to "cease and desist all Stryker brigade expansion activities."

The Army garrison commander met with Native Hawaiian representatives last week to work toward an agreement, Griffin said, adding, "We are absolutely wanting to listen to the concerns, and we are listening."

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