



Department of the  
Environment

# Facts About...

**Kent Defense Industries (MD-532)  
State Master List Site**

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## Site Location

From 1941 through 1954, the 20-acre Kent Defense Industries (KDI) ordnance plant was located on property just southwest of 800 High Street, Chestertown, Kent County, Maryland 21620. The roughly L-shaped, angular shaped parcel of land is bounded to the northwest by Gillespie & Sons, Inc. Concrete Plant, to the south and west by Radcliffe Creek, to the east by industrial property and to the northeast by an old railroad right of way. The plant exploded in 1954 and the demolition debris was reportedly either spread in a low-lying area southwest of the property or transported to a quarry outside of town for disposal. The plant site is now the Chestertown Business Park and is comprised of several warehouse and office buildings, constructed between 1981 and 1991.

The site is situated in an area of Chestertown that has been used for commercial/industrial purposes since the 1800s. The site is located on Radcliffe Creek, a tributary to the Chester River, and is situated 40 feet above mean sea level. The geographic coordinates are latitude 039° 12' 48" north and longitude 076° 04' 38" west based on NAD27 data collected from the 1973 revision of the 1953 Chestertown 1:24000 quadrangle map. The Maryland grid coordinates are north 504,000 feet and east 1,061,700 feet.

## Site History

The site was originally part of Usiltons Addition, a 19th century farm. In 1923, Herbert F. Usilton lost the property to the Kent County Savings Bank in a bank foreclosure. The property was transferred to Gilbert M. Hadaway in 1937 and subdivided. Hadaway et al transferred a portion of the property to S. Scott Beck in 1940. In 1942, they transferred a separate parcel to a group that included Phillip G. Wilner. Wilner was part owner of KDI. The corporate entity, KDI, acquired the property in 1944 and operated an ordnance manufacturing facility at the site until 1954. For 13 years, KDI manufactured flares, fuses, munitions components, and military fireworks. After the explosions of July 17, 1954, the plant closed down and the property eventually was transferred to Vita Foods Incorporated and finally to Dixon Valve.

Under KDI's ownership, there were 300 employees and 65 buildings on the property. Fifty-seven small buildings housed production lines for the manufacture of ordnance products. Eight larger buildings housed offices, and storage facilities. Many of the site buildings were noted to be either sheds or shacks, most of which were damaged or demolished in the 1954 explosion. Following the explosion, the majority of waste material from the site was transported to a local quarry, now identified as KDI Pit, for disposal (see fact sheet for MD-535 KDI Pit). This included fireworks, fuses, waste ordnance, and munitions related materials. The remaining waste was pushed to the property's marshy western margins and left in place.



## Environmental Investigations

KDI is documented to have disposed of waste material from the manufacture of fireworks and military ordnance on the margins of the property. It is suspected that an area of the property was used as an open burning dump for manufacturing waste and off-spec fireworks and munitions.

MDE performed a Site Investigation of the soils, sediments, groundwater and surface waters of the KDI site in November 2005. The samples were analyzed for the presence of metals and cyanide, volatile organic compounds, semi-volatile organic compounds, pesticides and polychlorinated biphenyls, and perchlorates. A toxicological assessment was performed on the resulting data and it was determined that risk estimates for dermal exposure to detected noncarcinogenic surface soil contaminants exceeded Maryland Department of the Environment and Environmental protection Agency recommended levels for the child visitor population using the maximum detected concentrations.

The findings indicated that additional investigation might be necessary to better characterize the two disposal areas identified in the 2005 investigation.

## Current Status

The site is now a business park; buildings or asphalt covers much of the property. There are some grassy buffers surrounding the buildings and ringing the property. The potential for exposure to contamination is minimized by the ground cover.

The site is on the State Master List that identifies potential hazardous waste sites in Maryland. The State Master List includes sites currently identified by the EPA's Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Information System. The information contained in the fact sheet presents a summary of past investigations and site conditions currently known to the Maryland Department of the Environment.

## Contact

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