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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

LOGISTICS AND COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION

OCTOBER 29, 1979

B-196336

The Honorable Andrew Jacobs, Jr.
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Jacobs:

Subject: [Alleged Destruction of Jet Fuel at Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho] (LCD-80-15)

This report is in response to your request that we look into the alleged destruction of jet fuel at Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho, because of overstockage of such fuel.

We visited Mountain Home and reviewed jet fuel inventory transactions and records and interviewed Air Force officials responsible for managing the jet fuel. Also, as agreed with your office, we evaluated the Air Force's April 25, 1979, response to you on this matter.

In summary, we found no evidence that jet fuel was destroyed at Mountain Home due to overstockage. We did find that both contaminated and uncontaminated jet fuel have been destroyed as part of an authorized firefighting training program. During the 10-month period ended June 30, 1979, almost 7,000 gallons of jet fuel were used during such training. Most of the fuel used in the program was uncontaminated (about 4,300 gallons), but it appeared to us that sufficient quantities of contaminated fuel were available to meet the program's needs. We discussed this matter with local Air Force officials and suggested that, in the future, they use more contaminated fuel so that uncontaminated fuel can be saved for flying aircraft. Local officials advised us that they were taking actions to see that this was done.

NO EVIDENCE OF JET FUEL DESTROYED DUE TO OVERSTOCKAGE

We found no evidence of jet fuel being destroyed due to overstockage at Mountain Home. Our review of base inventory

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records for the 15-month period ended June 30, 1979 (which includes the time frame in which the allegation of such destruction was made) indicated that jet fuel was never in an overstocked position nor was jet fuel destroyed to avoid an overstocked position. In our review, we observed the procedures followed by fuels personnel to account for fuel transactions and tested to see that receipts and issues of fuel were properly accounted for. Further, we questioned base officials responsible for managing the receipt and issuance of jet fuel as to the alleged destruction and were advised that no such destruction had taken place.

Therefore, we have no basis for disagreeing with the Air Force's response to you stating that fuel was not being destroyed at Mountain Home due to overstockage.

UNCONTAMINATED JET FUEL USED IN FIRE TRAINING PROGRAM

The Air Force also stated in its April 1979 reply that the only fuel that is destroyed at the base is destroyed as part of the base firefighting training program. The Air Force stated that approximately 1,700 gallons of JP-4 fuel had been used for this purpose since January 1, 1979. According to our review of base records, about 1,700 gallons of uncontaminated JP-4 jet fuel was issued for firefighting training exercises during the period January 1 through March 4, 1979.

To provide wider coverage of fuel issuances to the firefighting program, we selected the 10-month period September 1, 1978, through June 30, 1979, for our analysis.

This analysis, like the Air Force's, showed that some jet fuel was used to support the base firefighting training program. During the 10-month period, we identified 19 training days where jet fuel was used in exercises to simulate aircraft fires through the use of mock aircraft placed in a firepit training area. For 12 of the 19 training days, uncontaminated JP-4 jet fuel was issued for these exercises. The uncontaminated fuel was pumped directly to the firepit site by the same tank trucks that provided refueling service to flight-line aircraft. According to Mountain Home's records, about 4,300 gallons of uncontaminated JP-4 fuel were used in the firefighting training exercises during the 12 training days.

MARGINALLY CONTAMINATED FUEL USED IN THE FIRE TRAINING PROGRAM

We found that, in addition to the jet fuel supplied from base stock for training, additional quantities were supplied from marginally contaminated jet fuel 1/ recovered during routine maintenance and repair functions.

The marginally contaminated jet fuel was collected and stored in an underground tank approximately 200 feet from the firepit training area. A pump which was attached to the storage tank pumped the fuel through a hose to the firepit area in the quantity necessary to simulate the type of fire required in the exercise.

The use of marginally contaminated fuel for live firefighting training exercises not only conserves good fuel but is less costly than burning uncontaminated base jet fuel stock. However, during the 10-month period ended June 30, 1979, only 7 of the 19 exercises used marginally contaminated jet fuel.

MORE MARGINALLY CONTAMINATED FUEL COULD BE USED IN FIRE TRAINING EXERCISES

We found that, while a considerable volume of contaminated fuel is being recovered, only a portion is being used for training. During the 10-month period covered by our review, only about 2,600 gallons of the nearly 10,000 gallons of marginally contaminated fuel that were available were used to simulate aircraft fires. Thus, over 7,000 gallons of marginally contaminated fuel were onhand at the end of June 1979 for firefighting training.

Although Mountain Home did not retain records to show the quantity of contaminated fuel that was available prior to each exercise, it appeared to us that the quantity of marginally contaminated fuel that was available was more than adequate to meet the needs of the training program. Furthermore, if Mountain Home continues to generate marginally contaminated fuel at the same rate and does not change training requirements appreciably, then there should be no need to divert its uncontaminated jet fuel from use in flying aircraft.

1/Fuel containing not more than 10 percent oils and other lubricants.

We suggested to base fire protection and fuels management personnel that they use more marginally contaminated fuel for training purposes. They advised us that the primary inhibitor to greater use of contaminated fuel--an inefficient pumping system attached to the storage tank--was being replaced. They hoped that the new pump system would greatly reduce the old system's 2- to 3-hour pumping time required for 300 gallons of fuel (average quantity for a training exercise) to nearer the 30 seconds it takes to pump a like quantity from a fuel truck. Members of the base civil engineering group told us that materials for the new pump system have been delivered and that the work will be performed within the next 60 days.

On the basis of past experience, base fuels and fire protection personnel at Mountain Home believe that with the addition of the new pump system, marginally contaminated fuel will be pumped at a fast enough rate to satisfy training needs.

POSSIBILITY OF RECOVERING HEAVILY CONTAMINATED JET FUEL AND OTHER PETROLEUM PRODUCTS

In addition to marginally contaminated fuel, the base collects more heavily contaminated jet fuel 1/ which it plans to dispose of by sale to a contractor. Air Force regulations do not authorize the open burning of such fuel due to environmental considerations.

The Air Force stated in its reply to you that 13,000 gallons of contaminated fuel have been accumulating on base since July 1978 and is awaiting disposal action. However, our review indicated that since May 1978 (date of the last sale) the base had collected only about 3,700 gallons of heavily contaminated fuel. In addition, the base was collecting heavily contaminated oils and solvents in separate storage tanks. As of July 1979 nearly 13,000 gallons of these heavily contaminated products had accumulated, as follows:

1/Fuel containing more than 10 percent oils and other lubricants.

	Gallons
Fuels	3,700
Mineral oils	1,713
Synthetic oils	5,633
Solvents	1,567
	12,613

Base officials told us that all of these heavily contaminated products would probably be sold to a contractor.

We discussed with Mountain Home officials the possibility of recovering and using the heavily contaminated fuel in the firefighting training program to save uncontaminated fuel for flying aircraft. The base civil engineer told us that he has considered alternative ways of using the contaminated products more advantageously. For example, he considered various options permitted by the Air Force for using heavily contaminated waste in base heating plants. However, he has not studied the feasibility of these options primarily because the quantity of heavily contaminated fuel and other petroleum waste may not be enough to make the project pay for itself.

Since the base received only 3.5 cents a gallon for the heavily contaminated products it sold in May 1978, we suggested to base officials that they make a study using cost-benefit analysis techniques to determine the feasibility of upgrading the use of heavily contaminated petroleum products with a view to conserving as much uncontaminated fuel as practicable.

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At our close-out meeting with base command officials, we emphasized the potential for using more of the marginally contaminated jet fuel for firefighting training. We suggested that they give top priority to replacing the inefficient pump system currently in use. We also emphasized the need to study the feasibility and cost-benefits of using heavily contaminated petroleum products to reduce the need for good fuel. Base command officials generally agreed with our analysis and stated they would follow up on our suggestions.

We did not obtain written comments on this inquiry. However, we did discuss its contents with Air Force officials. As agreed with your office, we are sending copies of this report to the Secretaries of Defense and the Air Force.

Sincerely yours,

R. W. Gutmann
Director