



Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation Spill Prevention and Response

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GALENA AIR FORCE STATION


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Status: Active

Database Name: Galena AFS

Location: Galena, Alaska

Latitude/Longitude: See database entries

This site has a [Restoration Advisory Board](#), which involves the community.

DEC Contaminated Sites contact: [Fred Vreeman](#), Project Manager, 907-451-2181 (Fairbanks)

U.S. Air Force contacts: [Al Weilbacher](#), Project Manager for Galena, Air Force Civil Engineer Center, 866-725-7617 (JBSA Lackland, Texas; JBSA stands for Joint Base San Antonio)

[Chad Starr](#) and [Mark Kinkade](#), Public Affairs Officers, Air Force Civil Engineer Center, 866-725-7617 (JBSA Lackland, Texas)

Contacts Updated March. 5, 2013

Summary Updated June 26, 2006

DESCRIPTION

The Galena Airport is located in the City of Galena on the Yukon River about 270 miles west of Fairbanks, Alaska. Galena is located in traditional Koyukon Athabaskan Indian territory. The airport was constructed in 1940. During World War II, Galena supported the Alaska-Siberia route for transfer of aircraft to the Soviet Union. Since 1951, the U.S. Air Force has had joint civilian-military use of the airfield, which became a Forward Operating Base for fighter-interceptors to meet the threat of Soviet bombers during the Cold War until the base was drawn down in 1993. ([Additional history appears below](#)).

Through military operations over the years, releases of hazardous chemicals occurred via spills or historical disposal practices. The Air Force has identified numerous Installation Restoration Program Sites ([IRP](#)) that are defined as sites with contamination from past (pre-1985) Air Force activities ([see map below](#)). The U.S. Air Force is the responsible party for cleaning up these sites following the federal Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act ([CERCLA](#)) standards for protecting people, animals, and the environment. DEC oversees the cleanup to ensure that it meets the State of Alaska standards.

The Air Force and DEC work with local stakeholders, including the Loudon Tribal Council and City of Galena via the Galena Technical Project Team to address their environmental concerns. The [Technical Project Team](#) meets regularly and consists of representatives of each agency and stakeholder.

In addition, communication with Galena community members occurs via a [Restoration Advisory Board](#). While the Restoration Advisory Board has been inactive for the past few years due to the involvement of many stakeholders in the Technical Project Team, it is anticipated that the Restoration Advisory Board will



The full moon in January at midday over the airport runway and control tower.



The Yukon River, its resources and quality of life it brings to Galena, is symbolic of the need to contain and clean up contamination from the Air Force base.

be considered for reactivation after the Technical Project Team completes its mandate.

The Galena Airport occupies a total area of 84 acres and is comprised of a number of buildings and other structures. The Air Force-owned structures comprise the majority of facilities at Galena Airport, although there are other non-Air Force (City of Galena, Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, Bureau of Land Management) properties there as well. Under the 2005 round of Base Realignment and Closure legislation, the former Galena Air Force Base was identified for complete deactivation. Land formerly reserved or leased by the Air Force is currently in the process of reverting to the State of Alaska or being transferred to the City of Galena for reuse.



A geoprobe being used in August 2002 to learn more about the free-phase petroleum in the ground around the vocational school's aviation technology building.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Contaminated sites at the Galena Airport include:

- ▶ Petroleum-contaminated soil and groundwater at several locations around the airport, such as the two fuel tank farms (Million Gallon Hill and the Petroleum, Oils, and Lubricants [POL] Tank Farm), the Fire Protection Training Area, the JP-4 Fillstands, and the Southeast Runway Fuel Spill area ([see map below](#));
- ▶ Chlorinated-solvents in groundwater beneath maintenance shops (Buildings 1845 and 1700); and
- ▶ Pesticide-contaminated soil around the airport.

Potential pathways for contaminant exposure include contaminated groundwater migrating to drinking water wells or to the Yukon River, vapors migrating from subsurface contamination into buildings, direct contact with contaminated subsurface soils, and accumulation of contaminants in wildlife harvested for subsistence.

CURRENT STATUS

The Galena Airport is currently in the Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS) Phase of the CERCLA cleanup process. This means extensive investigation of the Galena Airport is being completed to assess the total extent of contamination, determine the associated risks to humans and the environment, and evaluate different mechanisms to cleanup the contamination. As part of the RI/FS, a [Risk Assessment](#) is being developed to address the risks posed to human health by contamination at each of the IRP Sites. Some of key preliminary findings are summarized in the following bullets.

- ▶ The groundwater data collected to date indicates the water from the base drinking water well is safe to drink, and that contaminated groundwater is most likely not reaching the Yukon River.
- ▶ The Galena City School District operates an Aviation Vocational Technical Center within the boundaries of the POL Tank Farm site. There is the potential that petroleum vapors are migrating into the school building from subsurface soil and groundwater contamination resulting from the Tank Farm. However, the Air Force installed a subsurface depressurization system in August 2002 to minimize vapor movement into the building, and subsequent air sampling and system monitoring have found the system to be effective. Additional background information is provided in the report, "Environmental Update: Galena Public School System Aviation Vocational Training Center" ([PDF 2.76M](#)), written by the US Air Force, 611th CES/CEVR.
- ▶ Potential risks to subsistence resources continue to be evaluated. This will be addressed by the Risk Assessment currently under development.
- ▶ Bioventing treatment systems designed to remediate contaminated soil have been tested at Million Gallon Hill and the POL Tank Farm in the summers of 2003 and 2004. The findings from these tests will be included in the pending RI/FS. Remedies for soil and groundwater contamination at the other IRP Sites will also be discussed in the RI/FS.

June 2005 note:

The draft RI/FS for the Galena Airport has been published, and currently comments are being reconciled by the Galena Technical Project Team. The draft document is too large to post for downloading, so please contact one of the project managers listed above to receive a copy of this document. Groundwater monitoring data gaps identified in the RI/FS will be addressed in the summer of 2006 by the installation and sampling of additional monitoring wells, as documented in the Galena Technical Memorandum for Ground Water Monitoring Wells, [downloadable below](#).

prospects south of the Yukon River. The location was on the site of a former Athabaskan fish camp recorded in the 1880 Census map as Natulaten. A school was established in the mid-1920s and post office opened in 1932. The population of Galena in 1940, the year the military began a major buildup in Alaska, was 30. Most were Athabaskan Indians who moved there from other, nearby villages on the Yukon River.

Galena Airport was constructed in 1941 and 1942 and was used as an auxiliary airfield for the American-Soviet Lend-Lease program during World War II. Although the airfield was built by the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA) as part of a broader program of civilian airport expansion in Alaska, the U.S. Army established a military post at Galena in June 1942. During 1942–1945, Galena supported the Alaska-Siberia route for transfer of aircraft to the Soviet Union under Lend- Lease.

After World War II, the CAA resumed control of Galena Airport. However, in early 1951, the U.S. Air Force negotiated an agreement with the CAA for joint civilian-military use of the airfield. Galena Airport was established as a Forward Operating Base for fighter-interceptors to meet the threat of Soviet bombers that had developed during the early years of the Cold War. Galena Airport served as the northernmost Forward Operating Base until the end of the Cold War, and fighter-interceptors based there made the majority of interceptions of Soviet aircraft over Alaska. In 1993, following the end of the Cold War, Galena was drawn down.

On 1 October 1993, the Air Force turned over responsibility for operating and maintaining the Galena Forward Operating Base to a contractor. All military personnel were withdrawn and the Air Force facilities reverted to a caretaker status. The contractor assumed responsibility for keeping Galena's runway open and maintaining selected Air Force facilities on a standby basis as a weather and alternate emergency base and for support of periodic alert exercises.

* - *Information from 1) the Cultural Resources Management Plan for Galena Airport, Alaska, June 2000, prepared for the U.S. Department of the Air Force 611th Civil Engineer Squadron, Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska by John F. Hoffecker and Mandy Whorton, Argonne National Laboratory and 2) a historical summary provided by the 11 AF History Office.*

Other websites about Galena:

- ▶ [Galena City Schools](#)
- ▶ Alaska Department of Community and Economic Development [Community Information Summary on Galena](#) (select Galena from community list)
- ▶ [CERCLA Overview](#)

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