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Families living in old military housing need to be aware of risks

- The Guam Daily Post

Jul 11, 2017

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Longtime Guam residents remember many parts of Tiyan as a military installation that was inaccessible to the larger civilian community.

The former Naval Air Station was subsequently turned over to the government of Guam, which then turned over certain land parcels and former military housing units to local families that made claim to those properties as part of their ancestors' real estate possessions.

What followed after the closure of the former military air station was a mix of good and bad.

Parts of Tiyan have now become a modern hub for air cargo logistics. That's in large part to the building developed by PacAir, based on a long-term lease on government land.

The first phase of the Tiyan Parkway, that relatively new road providing critical access between Route 8 in central Guam to the northern parts of the island through a Route 10A, has also been made possible as a result of the military downsizing that shut down the Naval Air Station facility in the late 1990s, and in large part through funding assistance from the Federal Aviation Administration.

Unfortunately, parts of Tiyan, particularly on the main strip between the airport and the intersection at Cars Plus, has increasingly turned into blight. There are abandoned houses with weeds growing on rooftops, and houses with junk cars and graffiti along the main road. The weeds from the yards of some of the abandoned houses have been creeping closer to the government road.

The houses that are abandoned and rotting away, within less than a mile of Guam's international gateway for tourists, do not reflect well on an island that sells its beauty to international visitors.

There are also former military houses on the strip that are occupied by families.

For those old military houses that are occupied along the parkway at Tiyan, the government of Guam needs to fully address whether the families living there have been apprised of the health risks the Navy has warned about concerning these properties.

Rear admiral: 'We are concerned for the safety of potentially impacted residents'

On March 12, 2013, Navy Rear Admiral T.D. Payne wrote to GovGuam that the old military housing structures are "limited to industrial use only."

The admiral further requested that GovGuam restrict the structures to industrial use because a comprehensive environmental review in 2009 deemed the houses are "not suitable for residential use."

"We are concerned for the safety of potentially impacted residents," the admiral wrote.

While much has been said about the toxic chemical Agent Orange having been allegedly used in Guam, and potentially exposed military veterans, not much concern is being raised – at least not publicly – about families living in former military structures that the military itself has warned isn't suitable for habitation.

Something's missing in this picture, but the families living there need to be fully apprised of what they're potentially risking.