

Evaluation and Management of Cold War Era Historic Properties

EVS has developed systematic approaches to the inventory, evaluation, and management of Cold War era historic properties at various Air Force, Army, and U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) installations. The approaches developed by EVS have allowed the sponsors to comply with federal laws and regulations governing cultural resources and continue mission-critical operations.

PROBLEM/OPPORTUNITY

The fall of the Berlin Wall was one of the most dramatic events of the 20th century. Countless other events, symbols, and relics of the 45-year conflict between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics contribute to understanding the historical significance of the Cold War. As the world continues to adjust to the end of the Cold War, federal agencies — primarily the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and DOE — recognize the need to preserve the Cold War legacy while its history is fresh. Downsizing, realignment, and base closures have created an urgency to complete evaluations before important properties are unintentionally altered or destroyed without being documented.

DOD and DOE began broad evaluations of their Cold War era properties in 1991. Although sites and facilities less than 50 years old must possess “exceptional importance” to qualify for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) (Title 36, Part 60.4g, of the Code of Federal Regulations), some properties clearly meet this criterion and require some form of treatment as historic properties.

Evaluation and management of Cold War era properties present unique challenges to historic preservation that highlight the need for new approaches to the (1) historical evaluation of recent properties, (2) treatment of historic properties still in active use, and (3) historical documentation of complex technological systems in a cost-effective manner.

APPROACH

EVS has developed multilayered historical contexts for the evaluation of Cold War properties. By incorporating global, national, and installation-level contexts, defensible evaluations can be developed that will protect worthy properties yet are not so broad as to include properties of only marginal significance.

RESULTS

EVS has worked with various sponsors to identify workable management solutions for active Cold War era properties. EVS has also helped sponsors negotiate programmatic agreements for the continued operation of facilities that meet regulatory requirements yet do not impede these facilities’ daily operation.

FUTURE

EVS is refining and synthesizing historical information into scholarly and popular publications and developing sophisticated database tools, which will be integrated with installation operations, to manage historical information. The use of multimedia approaches and Internet-based technologies for presenting this information and providing easy access to it has been an important EVS contribution. Such technology-based systems have not only improved data accessibility but have also significantly reduced the costs of providing required material.

COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS

Facilities or systems that had gained significance during the Cold War became obsolete when it ended. Consequently, DOD and DOE plan to deactivate or demolish many facilities. EVS staff has prepared detailed documentation of the historical role of individual facilities and entire systems.

Documentation has included the preparation or enhancement of engineering drawings, photographic documentation of the interiors and exteriors of facilities, and the preparation of detailed historical narratives and popular booklets for public distribution.



*Ballistic Missile Early-Warning System Station at
Thule Air Base, Greenland.*