

## MY TURN | Public needs to know about Navy operations

Staff Reports

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### Public needs to know about Navy operations

What value is an open government if information is denied when the public needs it the most? Or when information becomes secret that is embarrassing to an agency or may bring an unfavorable public response to a governmental action?

The Navy is currently conducting an environmental review for a massive new wharf in Hood Canal, to be used to load Trident nuclear missiles onto submarines. The current estimate for the proposed four-year project is \$782 million. The Navy acknowledges that it has loaded Trident submarines at the Bangor submarine base for nearly 30 years with just one wharf. Now, with already reduced numbers of ballistic missile submarines, and much greater reductions in missiles and nuclear warheads in the near future, the Navy wants a second wharf.

The Navy claims it needs the wharf for the so-called Life Extension Program for the Trident D-5 missile. The Navy has stated that in the future, it will need twice the number of "operational days" to handle its 130,000-pound missiles as it does now.

In its environmental assessment, the Navy stated the 1,250 to 1,500 pilings for the wharf and overwater structure will cause "insignificant" cumulative impacts to Hood Canal. The Navy notes that some endangered species such as the Puget Sound orca, are occasionally seen in Hood Canal. The Navy adds that they have not dropped a missile, causing a catastrophic accident in Hood Canal in the past 30 years.

According to the Navy, that is all the public needs to know. They want the wharf and the rest is just a formality.

For the past two years, the Navy has denied my Freedom of Information Act requests for records explaining the need for the wharf, such as the Navy's Business Case Analysis and related records. Making records unavailable for public discussion, the Navy claims to have lost some records after gathering them for processing, and has withheld official determinations by the Navy's General Counsel.

I feel the Navy does not want the public to know that its proposed \$782 million wharf is unnecessary while crucial services in education, health care, and transportation are being cut for lack of funds.

The Navy also apparently does not want the public to know about the explosives hazards involving missiles at the wharf. One Trident SSBN submarine contains enough rocket propellant to equal 3.7 million pounds of TNT. The 24 missiles on a submarine now each carry about four nuclear warheads. Although the risk of a catastrophic accident is small at the base, the risk of an accident increases the more often the missiles are handled.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement is located at <https://www.nbkeis.com/ehw>. Some appendices to the Draft EIS, which would normally provide meaningful information, are completely withheld, such as Appendix A, Purpose and Need; Appendix B, Alternatives Considered; and Appendix C, Explosives Safety Arcs "

I first learned to file FOIA requests in 1986 when I discovered that a derailed train near Shelton contained large amounts of high explosives, despite denials from Navy officials. I have learned that FOIA suits against the Navy are difficult and time-consuming. The case recently decided 8-1 in my favor by the United States Supreme Court, Milner v. Navy, has taken over seven years. Although the Navy lost, I still do not have the records.

The Navy should tell citizens in the Puget Sound region the truth about its operations instead of hiding behind a veil of secrecy.

The Navy is conducting a public comment session for the proposed wharf at Bangor on April 19 in Poulsbo, April 20 in Chimacum and April 21 in Seattle. Each session is from 6 to 9 p.m. Come and bring some questions and see for yourself.

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