

West Point firm comes under fire

G4S/ITI blasted by neighbors for its counter-terrorism training gunfire, explosions

January 17, 2013 | By Matt Sabo, msabo@dailypress.com | 757-247-7872

KING AND QUEEN — Residents of rural King and Queen County who live near the G4S International Training Inc. compound adjacent to the Middle Peninsula Regional Airport understand the need for counter-terrorism training in the war on terror.

But for them, enduring the sounds of the gunfire and explosions at the nearby sprawling facility on the marshy banks of the York River not only sacrifices their rural peace — even to the point some say they can't hear the television in their own living room — it's also above and beyond the call of duty.

Even though he lives two miles away downriver, Steve Jadatz said his family can't enjoy the rural atmosphere.

"We cannot go outside and enjoy our land," Jadatz said. "We can't enjoy our garden, we can't sit outside and relax. It sounds like a war two miles away."

The conflict between G4S ITI and neighbors has simmered for years, particularly after county officials discovered much of the company's expansion has occurred without permits and approvals.

G4S ITI offers classroom and field training to help employees from government and private sectors to recognize, avoid and survive potential threats of organized attacks, kidnappings and violent crimes, according to the company's website. Courses are offered in pavement and off-road driving training, firearms, improvised explosive devices and even hostage survival.

A public hearing is scheduled before the King and Queen Board of Supervisors in February on the company's request for a conditional use permit and rezoning application on the 482 acres where it operates. The company also leases adjacent land connected to the airport that is owned by the town of West Point.

At a Dec. 3 Planning Commission public hearing, nearby residents complained their windows rattle from gunfire, explosions and helicopters. They are routinely put on edge by the noise and visitors are stunned by the noise. The Planning Commission recommended to the Board of Supervisors rejecting both requests.

The arrival of G4S ITI in 1989 was hailed by a King and Queen County supervisor as an important first step in the overall development of the county. The company's application stated that 95 percent of the operations will involve evasive and defensive driver training, but training in "small arms familiarization" and improvised explosive devices will also be offered.

Initially the evasive driving courses were to be taught on two abandoned runways at the airport. Since then, however, the company has built off-road driving courses on West

Point and G4S ITI properties, neither of which were approved, according to county documents.

Tim Trant, an attorney representing G4S ITI, wrote in the company's applications that the firm will work on obtaining a sound analysis to evaluate the effects on neighbors and develop "sound attenuation measures" to address the noise.

"ITI is committed to being a good neighbor and a good corporate citizen," Trant wrote.