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Controversial herbicide may be moved from Seabee base

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NEWS EDITOR

A controversial defoliant outlawed during the Vietnam war may be moved from its resting place at the Seabee Center in Gulfport early next year, it was disclosed Wednesday.

A spokesman for the Air Force in Washington said Wednesday that Herbicide Orange, known as Agent Orange when it was used to clear jungles in Vietnam, will be shipped to the Pacific and incinerated if Air Force plans go unchallenged and the Environmental Protection Agency refuses to allow its sale.

The 15,000 55-gallon barrels would be shipped by the German-owned incinerator ship *Vulcanus* to an area near Johnston Island in the Pacific and burned along with the Air Force's other stockpile of the herbicide at a federal compound on the island, the spokesman said.

The *Vulcanus* recently burned 4,000 tons of chemical waste in the Gulf of Mexico for Shell Chemical

Co., an action which came under fire from Louisiana environmentalists but later declared to have brought no harm to the sea, air or wildlife.

The herbicide contains the contaminant dioxin which causes birth defects in laboratory animals, according to some scientists.

In 1970, the Department of Agriculture banned the use of a compound contained in the defoliants. The Air Force shortly thereafter banned its use and the Environmental Protection Agency has blocked its sale.

The 825,000 gallons stored at the Seabee Center was halted in transport in 1970 when the Air Force ceased its usage.

The Air Force spokesman in Washington said a final environmental impact study will be filed "shortly...perhaps by the end of the year."

The study will contain plans for the herbicide to be shipped to the Pacific and burned either at sea on the *Vulcanus* or at a facility constructed on Johnston Island. Re-

search points toward burning the chemical at sea instead of building a facility on the island, the spokesman said.

After the final study is filed, the Air Force will wait 30 days during which time challenges to the disposal procedure could be declared. The Air Force is hoping for EPA approval or silence, and if it receives either, it will begin steps to implement the burning.

The Air Force still hopes that it can sell the defoliant but the EPA has reached no decision on its possible sale.

The supply of Herbicide Orange, the Air Force says, originally cost about \$17 million but is now worth about \$80 million on the open market because of a shortage of chemical herbicides.

"We'd like to sell it and save the taxpayers money," the Air Force spokesman said.

"We have to get rid of it one way or the other; if the EPA doesn't permit its sale or make a decision one way or the other, we'll burn it."