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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "HEARING MAY BE HELD ON HERBICIDE REPROCESSING" NCBC
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Hearing may be held on herbicide reprocessing

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The Mississippi Air and Water Pollution Control Commission will conduct a public hearing if it receives an application to construct a facility to reprocess the Herbicide Orange stored at the Seabee Center in Gulfport a commission official said Monday.

The commission's chief enforcement officer, John Harper, said a public hearing on the Gulf Coast "will be a part of issuance of a permit to Agent Chemical Inc.," a firm which has proposed to reprocess the 800,000 gallons of herbicide at the Seabee Center.

Harper said no date has been set for a public hearing because no application to construct or operate a reprocessing plant has been received by the state agency.

In October, the Air Force, which oversees the toxic defoliant, proposed that a private firm reprocess the herbicide to remove a toxic contaminant known as dioxin. Agent Chemical of Houston, Tex., conducted a pilot reprocessing program last summer which showed dioxin could be absorbed by coconut carbon filters.

An Air Force spokesman said Monday another amendment to its proposal will be filed in mid-February to counter questions and criticisms raised by other federal agencies and environmentalists.

If the Air Force is able to proceed with reprocessing, negotiations between Agent Chemical and the federal government will follow. The earliest that the 90-day reprocessing project could begin is August, according to the Air Force.

Harper said that as soon as the state agency receives an application for a permit, it will give 30 days notice for a public hearing.

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Hearing

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Agent Chemical will need permits for construction and operation of the plant, Harper said.

Harper said Agent Chemical and the Air Force will be responsible for monitoring any air emissions produced by reprocessing.

Harper also said the pollution control commission did not require a public hearing before issuing permits for the pilot project because it was "a special project . . . of such a small magnitude." He said the commission's staff made a "judgement call."

Harper's disclosure that a public hearing would be held if a permit were sought follows a meeting last week between commission and top Air Force officials.

Earlier Monday, Harrison County supervisors said they had received letters from Rep. Trent Lott, R-Miss., in which the congressman said he had "requested that the Air Force remove the Herbicide Orange the quickest and safest possible way."

Contacted in Washington, Lott said he has not used his congressional authority to direct the Air Force to take any specific steps but has urged the herbicide's removal in "the safest way possible."

Asked if the herbicide should be

removed from Gulfport prior to reprocessing, Lott replied, "I am not prepared at this time to draw a firm conclusion on whether there is a quicker and safer way (of removing the herbicide) than reprocessing."

According to the Air Force, about 300 cannisters containing contaminated carbon would result from reprocessing and be stored by the Air Force until an environmentally safe method of final disposition is found.

The Air Force has not named where the cannisters would be stored but Lott said Monday Mississippi has been ruled out. "They (the Air Force) have assured me the cylinders will be removed from Mississippi," Lott said. "I have been told bluntly they will be taken out."

Lott's letters to the supervisors came several days after the board passed a resolution seeking the herbicide's removal. When the board passed the resolution, District Four Supervisor Hue Snowden said the defoliant constitutes "a danger to human life."

Several weeks ago, Pass Christian Mayor Steve Saucier said he opposed reprocessing in the Gulfport area and some residents have said they seek a public hearing on

the Air Force's plan.

The herbicide, of which another 1.5 million gallons is stored on Johnston Island in the Pacific, was banned in 1970 when it was linked to birth defects in Vietnam, where it had been used to destroy jungles. At one time the Air Force proposed to incinerate the chemical at sea but opposition forced the military to consider other alternatives, particularly reprocessing.