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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "DIOXIN-PURGING MACHINE ARRIVES IN GULFPORT" NCBC
GULFPORT MS
9/1/1986
SUN HERALD

6280/5

Dioxin-purging machine arrives in Gulfport

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Thirteen tractor-trailer trucks were needed to carry the equipment that will purge the dioxin from the contaminated soil at the Naval Construction Battalion Center in Gulfport.

The caravan arrived at the Seabee base Wednesday afternoon, and initial unloading was to start immediately.

Air Force Capt. Terry Stoddart, project spokesman, said assembly and testing of the portable incinerator will require about 60 days. The soil-cleansing process is expected to start in mid- to late December and will take about 90 days with around-the-clock burning.

The Air Force Engineering and Services Center Laboratory at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., is responsible for the \$5.4 million cleanup of the contaminated 12 acres. An estimated 9,000 tons of soil have to be baked to get rid of the dioxin.

The soil was contaminated during and after the Vietnam War when the defoliant, Agent Orange, leaked from some of the 17,000 barrels stored at the base.

Dioxin is a by-product of Agent Orange.

The Seabee base incineration project, like other dioxin-neutralizing projects, is still experimental, al-

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though incineration has proven effective in decontaminating dioxin-laden soil in other instances.

The gas-fired incinerator used at the Seabee Center has been tested in Eldorado, Ark., and similar systems have been used by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in cleanups of civilian sites.

However, Capt. Terry Stoddart, an Air Force spokesman, said the Gulfport cleanup will be the first large-scale use of the furnaces. The incinerators used in the EPA projects had only a fourth of the capacity of the one that will be used at the Seabee base.

Stoddart said the experiment is necessary to see if the system is reliable, cost effective and efficient in the removal of hazardous materials from the soil.

The Air Force will also experiment with a chemical dioxin-removal method. The chemical will be applied to a contaminated concrete slab, contaminated soil and contaminated soil placed in a tank. Stoddart said that after the chemically-decontaminated soil and concrete have been tested they also will be burned.

*Sun Daily Herald
09/86*