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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "LAST DIOXIN-TAINTED SOIL TO BE BURNED" NCBC GULFPORT
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Last dioxin-tainted soil to be burned

Photo, B-4

By **MIKE STOBBE**

STAFF WRITER

■ Next month, the Air Force plans to incinerate the last of 24,000 tons of dioxin-contaminated soil at the Naval Construction Battalion Center in Gulfport — a \$16 million operation that took years of planning and 10 months of burning.



"We anticipate the completion of the soil processing by mid-October," said Air Force Maj. Terry Stoddart, who is overseeing the burning of the dirt.

"Following that, we're going to go through six to eight weeks of demobilization and decontamination. That means we're going to tear the thing (incinerator) down."

The incinerator was erected in the center of the Seabee base in November to burn dioxin out of soil on which 17,000 barrels of Agent Orange were stored in the late 1960s and early

1970s. The Air Force had stockpiled the dioxin there, and was responsible for disposing of it after it was banned in 1971, Stoddart said.

Dioxin is an ingredient in Agent Orange. More than 18 million gallons of Agent Orange were sprayed in and around combat areas in South Vietnam until it was banned. Medical experts have linked Agent Orange to skin disease, birth defects, cancer and other health problems.

The liquid Agent Orange was destroyed by an incinerator ship, the Vulcanus, in 1977. But in deciding what to do with the 18 acres of dioxin-laced dirt left behind, the Air Force declined to follow the standard procedure of digging it up and transporting it to a hazardous waste dump, Stoddart said.

When Congress passed a funding program for military base waste cleanup in 1984, the Air Force used part of that money to study what to do about the Gulfport Seabee Base.

The dirt cleanup started with a mapping of the area, since some bar-

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rels had not leaked and soil patches in the contaminated area had no dioxin. The 18-acre area was divided into 2,000 "grids," each 20-by-20-feet, with the Air Force taking a surface sample of each grid. Roughly 100 holes, 5 feet deep, were dug in the contaminated area also, to make sure dioxin had not seeped down.

Groundwater at the base is about seven to 10 feet below the land's surface. The Air Force found very few cases in which the dioxin had seeped down more than one foot, and no seepages deeper than four feet, Stoddart said.

An incinerator was set up late last year to heat contaminated soil to a temperature of 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit.

The dirt burn originally was scheduled to run only until May. But the Air Force found an extra 3,000 cubic yards of contaminated dirt, and another five months and \$7 million were added onto the project's budget.

The burning evaporates the water and dioxin in the dirt into non-harmful water vapor and carbon dioxide, Stoddart said.

Dirt is taken out the incinerator, cooled in a vat of water, and then stored in air-tight containers. Samples are tested each day to make sure all dioxin has been removed. Then the dirt is replaced in the now-clean areas.

Soil nutrients, such as nitrogen and



TIM ISBELL/SUN HERALD PHOTOGRAPHER/1986

The incinerator will be used to burn the last dioxin-contaminated soil and will then be torn down.

phosphorous, are still in the cleaned soil. Stoddart said that when all the soil is replaced, the Air Force plans to fertilize and grass-seed the soil.

"That's probably the last thing we'll do."

When the soil burning is done, the two dump trucks and seven pieces of heavy earth-moving equipment must be driven into a metal basin and decontaminated with high-pressure water and steam. The cleaning water

than will be burned in the incinerator.

The conveyor belt that carries the dirt from truck into the incinerator will be cleaned in the same way. Finally the incinerator will be emptied and allowed to burn for 48 hours be-

fore it is disassembled and taken back to Ensco Inc., the Little Rock-based company that owns the cleaning equipment.

"At that point all will be cleaned," Stoddart said. "Then we'll go home."