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Dioxin turns up in bayou

Gulfport halts drainage work

by GEOFF PENDER
THE SUN HERALD

GULFPORT — The city has found small amounts of dioxin — believed to be from the Naval Construction Battalion Center — in Brickyard Bayou, and has halted a drainage project in the bayou until more tests are finished.

The dioxin levels found are above the state's minimum, but no cause for alarm, state Department of Environmental Quality officials said Wednesday. But DEQ will monitor further tests before allowing the city to restart the work.

The test was made last week under a bridge over Brickyard Bayou on Eighth Avenue, more than two miles from the Naval center. That's the farthest from the base significant levels of dioxin have been found.

"Around the middle of March we

should have more tests back," said Mayor Ken Combs. "It would have been easy to go ahead and do this project without testing, but that wouldn't have been the right thing to do."

The city is trying to untangle debris to help water drain into the bayou.

Dioxin is the term for a group of chemicals, some of which have been shown to cause cancer and birth defects in laboratory animals.

The level of dioxin found is 15 parts per trillion. The DEQ monitors any levels found over 4.7 parts per trillion said Jerry Banks, chief of the hazardous waste division for DEQ.

"Our number of 4.7 parts per trillion is very conservative," Banks said. "It's based on if someone actually ingested — ate — soil that contained this level every day for 70 years. That would mean your chance of cancer would increase by one in a

What's next

The Residents Advisory Board for dioxin cleanup at the Naval Construction Battalion Center in Gulfport will have its regular meeting at 6:30 p.m. today at the Headquarters Building on the

base. The meeting is open to the public. The board is made up of residents concerned about dioxin contamination on the base from storage of Agent Orange during the Vietnam War

million."

If more tests show similar levels, Banks said, the DEQ might regulate where and how the city disposes of soil from the project.

The dioxin likely came from Agent Orange stored for the Air Force at the Navy center during the Vietnam War. Dioxin probably traveled off the base in sediment that washed into ditches. Potentially hazardous dioxin levels have been found in soil at the base's border.

In March, DEQ ordered the Naval center and the Air Force to conduct

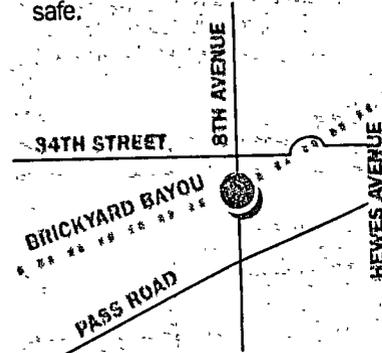
tests on and off the base. The tests will begin next month.

"The DEQ has approved our test plans," said Gordon Crane, environmental program manager at the center. "Once they are completed, the next step will be to provide them with the results, then go over plans" for cleanup.

The city didn't formally announce it had found the dioxin. Payment for the test showed up on a list of city payments, and North Gulfport resident Willie Miller asked councilmen about it Tuesday.

Dioxin found

A city of Gulfport test for a drainage project has shown dioxin levels above what the state considers safe.



LANA SUMPTER/THE SUN HERALD

Victor Andrews, who lives on 21 Avenue, was at the meeting check on the drainage work near his home.

"When the mayor mentioned dioxin, I decided to ask some questions," Andrews said. "Most of that water going into Brickyard Bayou flows my house."

Combs told Andrews he should worry because city drainage flows into the bayou.

Said Combs: "Unless water starts flowing uphill, there shouldn't be a problem."