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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "RESERVISTS GET HERBICIDE WORK" NCBC GULFPORT MS
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New Orleans, Louisiana

RESERVISTS GET HERBICIDE WORK

Job Prompts Complaints
Health Endangered

GULFPORT, Miss. (AP) — Army reservists from New Orleans have been spending their weekend drills working with the controversial herbicide known as Ageny Orange, prompting some complaints that their health is endangered by the powerful defoliant.

U.S. Army officials deny that the substance used until 1970 in Vietnam, is dangerous.

The men involved are members of the 355th General Supply Co. They have been assigned "training in warehouse procedures," which involves painting and moving the 15,285 55-gallon drums of the chemical — formally known as 2,4, 5-T and 2,4-D.

It is stored at the Seabee center here, and the reservists say some of the barrels leak and the men have not been trained to safely manipulate the barrels or lifting machines.

An official of the 5th Army Headquarters at Ft. Sam Houston in Texas acknowledged that at least one complaint had been made through congressional channels.

"In researching this," a spokesman said, "we went to the 5th Army medical lab and in their report discredited in effect any notion that any spillage or leaking would result in anything toxic."

He said fears of the chemical apparently stemmed from tests made at the Biogenics Research Laboratory in Bethesda, Md., in which samples of 2,4,5-T deformed the offspring of animals.

Source of that problem he said was a contaminant called dioxin, which he identified as a by-product of the manufacturing process which was limited to one-tenth of one part per million in the herbicide.

Brig. Gen. Russel T. LeBlanc, commander of the 377th support brigade, said that only three of the barrels were found leaking badly enough to be replaced, although he said one man reported 20 per cent leaked.

"These barrels have been in Gulfport three years and their storage is a normal, not dangerous, project," he said. "We use the safety precautions we would for any handling of drums."

"Scientists have worked in the substance up to the elbows without bad effects. There have been no records of health defects in Vietnam."

Spokesman said that any of the defoliant spilled on the skin can be washed off with soap. The workers are told not to drink it, he said.

Spokesmen said the job, which involves weekend work only, is scheduled to continue through the end of the year.

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