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Tests delayed for herbicide

By A STAFF WRITER

A pilot project at the Naval Construction Battalion Center in Gulfport to reprocess banned Herbicide Orange into a marketable product has been postponed six weeks because of technical problems, the Air Force said Thursday.

Representatives of Agent Chemical Inc., a Houston, Tex., firm which proposed to remove and destroy a toxic contaminant contained in the defoliant, told Air Force officials that an incinerating device failed to sustain a required temperature.

The incinerator would have been expected to destroy the banned contaminant, dioxin, after it was removed from the herbicide through a filtering process.

Under the pilot proposal, the burn would take place at 2,300 degrees Fahrenheit but the device constructed by Agent Chemical failed to sustain that temperature during preliminary testing at the Seabee Center.

An Air Force spokesman said representatives of the private firm estimated it would take six weeks to design and fabricate a new incinerator.

Earlier, Air Force officials predicted the actual pilot reprocessing would begin during the weekend.

The Air Force is seeking a method to dispose of more than 800,000 gallons of Herbicide Orange stored at the Seabee Center and 1.5 million gallons on Johnston Island in the Pacific.

The defoliant, known as Agent Orange during its controversial use to destroy jungles in Vietnam, was banned in 1970 after it was linked to birth defects in laboratory animals.

Last year, the Air Force proposed to burn the herbicide at sea but the Environmental Protection Agency urged further investigation into the feasibility of reprocessing the chemical.