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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "FIRM TO RESUME TESTS ON HERBICIDE ORANGE" NCBC
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Firm to resume tests on Herbicide Orange

By TIMOTHY KRIEHN

A Houston, Tex., chemical firm will try again this week to reprocess banned Herbicide Orange supplies stored at the Seabee Center in Gulfport into a usable defoliant, the Air Force said Wednesday.

In an experimental project, Agent Chemical, Inc. will attempt to separate two compounds of the defoliant from a contaminant known as dioxin which was linked to birth defects before the herbicide was banned in 1970.

The Air Force said the company proposes to destroy the filtered dioxin through incineration at its facility constructed last year. Successful testing of Agent Chemical's proposal could lead to commercial marketing of the more than 2.3 million gallons of Herbicide Orange stored at Gulfport and Johnston Island in the Pacific.

The herbicide was known as Agent Orange during its controversial use by the Air Force in the Vietnam war when it was used to defoliate jungles. But the Department of Agriculture and later the Department of Defense banned its use amid reports that it had been linked to birth defects.

The material is composed of 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T, two widely used herbicides, and small amounts of dioxin produced during the chemical's manufacture.

The Air Force, attempting to rid itself of the vexing and expensive herbicide, for which storage costs are \$140,000 annually, proposed a gear up to burn the chemical at sea. The Environmental Protection Agency, however, indicated it favored reprocessing the chemical over destruction and later Agent Chemical proposed its pilot project.

Agent Chemical planned to conduct tests at the Seabee Center in November but its incinerating device malfunctioned during preliminary tests.

Earlier this week, the company installed a new incinerator and completed other modifications. Construction and operation of the firm's pilot plant have been approved by the Mississippi Air and Water Pollution Control Commission.

Air Force project officer Karl Merrill

said the first experimental reprocessing of the Orange is expected to be conducted Saturday. A 55-gallon drum containing a low level of dioxin will be reprocessed in the initial sampling. Merrill said the company hopes to separate the dioxin from the remaining herbicide through an elaborate and proprietary charcoal filtering system.

The charcoal filter containing the dioxin will then be incinerated at 2,300 degrees Fahrenheit.

Samples of the reprocessed herbicide and residue from the incineration will be flown to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio over the weekend to determine their purity. Air monitoring at the site will be conducted by Gulf South Research Institute of New Orleans under contract by the EPA.

If initial analyses are optimistic, Merrill said additional quantities of Herbicide Orange will be reprocessed over the next two to four weeks. The Air Force is expected to issue a report on the pilot project 30 days after the reprocessing is completed.

A favorable report by the Air Force could result in the EPA approving the reprocessing method, a key step to Agent Chemical's experimental program. Following EPA approval, the Air Force would probably sell the herbicide through the Defense Supply Agency and there are indications that only companies which have demonstrated an effective and safe method of recycling would be able to bid.

Agent Chemical, which has invested more than \$250,000 in equipment alone at the Seabee Center, is the only firm actively pursuing a reprocessing method for the valuable herbicide.

The 2.3 million gallons of Herbicide Orange held by the Air Force cost \$17 million when it was purchased. With a current world-wide shortage of herbicides, however, it is valued at \$30 million to \$60 million.

The 800,000 gallons of the herbicide stored at the Seabee Center were en route to Southeast Asia when the chemical was banned. Most of the 1.5 million gallons on Johnston Island were removed from South Vietnam.

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