

N62604.AR.000052
NCBC GULFPORT
5090.3a

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "CHEMICAL COMPANY SEEKS REPROCESSING OF DEFOLIANT
ON COAST" NCBC GULFPORT MS
8/26/1976
SOUTH MISSISSIPPI SUN

Chemical company seeks reprocessing of defoliant on Coast

By TIMOTHY KRIEHN

The Houston, Tex., chemical company seeking to purify toxic Herbicide Orange will propose to reprocess more than 800,000 gallons of the chemical at the Seabee Center in Gulfport where it has been stored for six years.

Agent Chemical Inc. vice president Del Hightower said the firm, which completed a pilot project in July at the site, seeks full-scale reprocessing here because of the economic feasibility and because the Mississippi Air and Water Pollution Control Commission has said it does not want the contaminated chemical "hailed around the state."

Agent Chemical is awaiting the go-ahead to enter negotiations with the federal government to purchase the herbicide in Gulfport and an additional 1.5 million gallons stored on Johnston Island in the Pacific.

The company also must obtain a permit from California where it proposes to bury cartridges containing an isolated contaminant.

Herbicide Orange, a defoliant used by the Air Force in Vietnam but banned in 1970 when it was linked to birth defects, contains TCDD, more commonly called dioxin, a highly toxic chemical produced in the herbicide's manufacture.

Officials from nine federal agencies are studying a report submitted by the firm in July on its latest and apparently successful reprocessing tests.

Agent Chemical became interested in Herbicide Orange in 1975 after an Air Force proposal to incinerate the chemical at sea was turned down by the Environmental Protection Agency which said potential uses for the chemical should be explored.

pany.

In its latest attempt, seven test runs were conducted, six of which lowered the dioxin level to acceptable federal limits. Agent Chemical uses a filtration process to isolate dioxin in cartridges containing charcoal.

Federal officials involved in the disposition of Herbicide Orange have been described as "edgy" following a chemical accident last month involving dioxin in Italy which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of animals, the evacuation of hundreds of people and several abortions to women who were fearful of giving birth to defective babies.

Although federal officials and Hightower say the proposed reprocessing is substantially different than the manufacturing procedure which resulted in the accident in Italy the company has been requested by the Defense Supply Agency to specify safety precautions to be used at the Gulfport facility.

The same agency has also requested the company to detail its proposed manufacturing facility and to set land requirements and where the company proposes to reprocess the defoliant.

The Defense Supply Agency is the Department of Defense's administrator of property disposal.

The request for more information on Agent Chemical's proposal came Aug. 5, two days after a meeting in Washington of the federal officials studying the firm.

According to a Defense Supply Agency spokesman, the agencies are to make recommendations on Agent Chemical's proposal early in September. A decision on whether to enter into negotiations with the firm for the sale of the herbicide would be made "as soon as practicable," the spokesman said.



SOUTH MISSISSIPPI SUN/SONNY PIPPIN

Fifty-five-gallon drums of Herbicide Orange await proposed reprocessing at Seabee Center

MISS
SUN
26 AUG 76

Reprocessing of Herbicide Orange s

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A-1

His proposal for full-scale reprocessing in Gulfport contradicts what the Air Force's previous Herbicide Orange project officer, Karl Merrill, said last year. Merrill, who has since been assigned other duties, said during early stages of Agent Chemical's pilot processing that if the firm were successful and later purchased stocks from the government, full-scale work would not take place in Mississippi.

But the states of Alabama, Louisiana and Arkansas have said

they will not permit contaminated Herbicide Orange to cross their borders and Mississippi will not permit the chemical to be moved in its present state, according to John Harper, chief enforcement officer of the Mississippi Air and Water Pollution Control Commission.

The herbicide has been stored in 55-gallon drums, some which are rusting. Harper indicated that if the herbicide is to be moved, elaborate and perhaps financially prohibitive re-storage steps would have to be taken and the chemical would have to be relocated outside

of the state.

He said reprocessing would not be conducted in Mississippi "anywhere but on the Seabee base. It's the safest and best for the environment as a whole."

During its six-year stay at the Seabee Center, the chemical has been costing the Air Force \$1,000 a month in surveillance and re-drumming costs. The Air Force purchased all of its Herbicide Orange for about \$17 million in the late 1960s.

Agent Chemical's proposal partly hinges on an application un-

der consideration by California's health department to bury cartridges containing isolated dioxin in landfills.

Nine contaminated cartridges from the pilot project were scheduled to be buried in California by the BKK Corp. in July. The containers were never buried, however, because neither BKK nor Agent Chemical had obtained a permit, according to Hightower.

A Defense Supply Agency spokesman confirmed the cartridges are in California, unburied and under "tight security."

Agent Chemical's application, submitted last week, seeks authority to bury the nine cartridges and those which would be contaminated in future reprocessing.

The accident in Italy has raised additional questions concerning the dangers dioxin poses and what safeguards need to be taken during its handling.

A cloud of gas carrying about four pounds of dioxin crystals descended on Seveso, Italy, after an explosion at the Swiss-owned Icmesa factory which was manufacturing chemicals for a defoliant. The pollution spread over 600 acres, forcing 730 people to evacuate their homes, hospitalizing 35, killing hundreds of rabbits, cats, chickens and birds and resulting in at least three therapeutic abortions.

Hightower said, however, the explosion in Italy occurred when the chemical came in contact with a reactor under high pressure and temperature. He said his reprocessing plant is designed to isolate the dioxin at a temperature of about 212 degrees with very low pressure and no reactor. Herbicide Orange's boiling point is more than

Biloxi-Gulfport-Pascagoula, Miss., Thursday, August 26, 1970

ought in Gulfport

minutes and a cement floor with six-inch walls to contain any spilled herbicide. Additionally, the plant will have to meet federal Occupational Safety and Health Act requirements.

In its report on the pilot project, Agent Chemical demonstrated it could lower the dioxin level in the herbicide to below .1 parts per million (ppm), the level determined environmentally acceptable by the EPA.

The Defense Supply Agency withheld results of the test and other relevant information when the South Mississippi Sun requested access to the report under

The sixth test using herbicide with a high dioxin level failed to produce an environmentally useful product.

But by using a more elaborate method in the seventh and final test with a fairly high contaminated sample, the company met the .1 ppm level.

The Defense Supply Agency spokesman confirmed Hightower's optimism over the test results, saying that Agent Chemical "has demonstrated TCDD can be removed by charcoal process."

Hightower said that if the company is able to purchase the herbi-