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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "AIR FORCE PROPOSES TO REPROCESS HERBICIDE IN
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Air Force proposes to

BY TIMOTHY KRIEHN

ASSISTANT TO THE EDITOR

The Air Force on Wednesday officially proposed to reprocess the toxic Herbicide Orange stored at the Seabee Center in Gulfport, a procedure which would isolate a banned contaminant in charcoal filters and produce a usable herbicide.

The proposal for a private firm to conduct the reprocessing was announced in Washington where federal officials have been studying results from a pilot test conducted in June at the Gulfport installation. The Air Force

amended its final environmental statement in calling for the reprocessing and left the proposal open to public comment for at least 30 days before final decisions are made.

Acceptance by Air Force officials of a method designed by a Houston, Tex., chemical firm came nearly a year after the company first launched its pilot reprocessing. Agent Chemical Inc. encountered several technical problems in purifying the herbicide and did not report until July that it had lowered the level of a toxic contaminant, dioxin, to envi-

ronmentally acceptable levels.

Dioxin, produced during the chemical's manufacture, was banned for certain uses in 1970 when it was linked to birth defects. While it exists in Herbicide Orange in levels averaging 2 parts per million, herbicides containing more than .1 parts per million of dioxin have been banned.

The herbicide, which was used as a defoliant under the name of Agent Orange in the Vietnam War, is stored at the Seabee Center and on Johnston Island in the Pacific.

According to the Air Force, the herbicide stored in Gulfport would

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reprocess herbicide in Gulfport

be reprocessed where it is stored and the Orange on Johnston Island would be reprocessed there.

The Air Force said it proposed using the existing storage sites because they "provide maximum control over the unprocessed herbicides and minimize any potential hazards inherent in their transportation."

The Air Force did not mention that the Mississippi Air and Water Pollution Control Commission has said it will not allow the drums to be moved around Mississippi in their present condition and neighboring states have said they will

not permit Herbicide Orange to cross their borders.

Although Agent Chemical was not cited by the Air Force Wednesday in endorsing the reprocessing proposal, the firm is the only group under consideration to purchase the supply, reprocess it and sell it for commercial use.

The following is a projected step-by-step course the proposal could take.

— The Air Force's amended final environmental statement will be open for public comment for at least 30 days during which time the proposal could come under criti-

cism.

— If the proposal did not meet adverse reaction, the Air Force would turn over authority for the sale of Herbicide Orange to the Defense Supply Agency which would enter into discussions with Agent Chemical.

— The Defense Supply Agency and Agent Chemical would negotiate. Spokesmen for the government and the company have acknowledged that any sale must include both the 800,000 gallons stored on the Seabee facility and the 1.5 million gallons on Johnston

CONTINUED ON A-10

NEED MORE MONEY — Dr. Norman Nelson, head of the University Medical Center (left), and University of Mississippi Chancellor Porter

Fortune Jr. address the State Budget Commission. They asked for a \$68.5 million budget for the medical center for the 1977-78 fiscal year.

Reprocessing of herbicide proposed

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Island. The Air Force paid almost \$17 million for the herbicide and will be trying to recoup some of its losses. Before any agreement is reached, Agent Chemical will have to detail safety features in the Reprocessing method.

— If an agreement is reached, Agent Chemical would reprocess the herbicide near where it is presently stored during a 90-day period. The cartridges containing the isolated dioxin would be stored at a yet to be determined federal facility until an environmentally acceptable method is found to dispose of the contaminant. Reprocessing probably would not take place before early 1977.

— The clean herbicide, which is estimated to be worth \$30 million to \$60 million, would be sold overseas, a spokesman for Agent Chemical said Wednesday, who added, "Not one gallon will be sold in (this) country." The firm has spent at least \$300,000 in developing the method.

While reprocessing would end the Air Force's six-year problem

of disposing of 40,000 55-gallon drums, it would present the new headache of finding a method to dispose of several hundred cartridges containing the contaminated charcoal.

Originally, Agent Chemical proposed to incinerate the cartridges but the firm was unable to develop an acceptable method. The Air Force' amended statement, proposed that a site at a federal facility be selected for storage until methods are found to dispose of the cartridges.

Air Force officials declined to say what facilities are under consideration for the storage but the prerequisites of such an area apparently rule out the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

"Selection of a storage site would be based on the site's remoteness, controlled access, storage facilities, an arid climate and an area of low seismic activity," the Air Force said. "It is anticipated that a site under federal jurisdiction would provide maximum control with a minimum impact on local authorities."

In its July proposal, Agent Chemical proposed to bury the several hundred cartridges in a West Covina, Calif., landfill managed by the Ben K. Kazarian Co. (BKK). BKK, however, failed to obtain permits from California authorities to bury 12 cartridges produced during the pilot project and its request to bury cartridges resulting from future full-scale projects was rejected.

Although BKK acknowledged that the 12 cartridges have now been buried, a company spokesman Wednesday refused to say in what state.

Air Force officials said earlier in the day, "We have been advised by BKK that they have been permitted to dispose of the cartridges in a state-approved landfill outside of the state of California," but they said they did not know where and referred inquiries to BKK.

The BKK spokesman, citing publicity over a chemical accident involving dioxin in Italy which led to California's rejection of the firm's permit application, said, "We don't wish to say," when asked where the cartridges were.

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