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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "TOXIC SOIL DISPOSAL IN GULFPORT" NCBC GULFPORT MS
7/11/1986
SUN HERALD

Toxic soil disposal in Gulfport

SUN HERALD
EDITORIAL

11 JULY 86

The city of Gulfport will soon learn the hard way the lesson that has been taught in other parts of the world — toxic chemicals leave traces that must be erased.

More than 800,000 gallons of Agent Orange were stored at the Naval Construction Battalion Center in West Gulfport over a 10-year period from 1967 to 1977.

How to dispose of it was a controversy that raged for years until it was finally decided that it could be safely burned at sea in the Dutch incinerator ship *Vulcanus*.

The problem now is that Agent Orange containers on the 18-acre Navy base site rusted and leaked, contaminating the soil. That soil must now be incinerated.

The area in question is contaminated with dioxin, a toxic substance that is formed in the manufacture of Agent Orange, used during the Vietnam War by the Air Force to defoliate jungles in Southeast Asia.

Servicemen who handled the chemical complained that it caused health problems and even birth defects among their children.

An incinerator will be brought to Gulfport on 18-wheelers beginning Aug. 4. The burning will take place 24 hours per day, seven days a week and is expected to continue until late December or early January.

The stack of the incinerator, when in operation, emits nothing worse than carbon dioxide and water, according to the Air Force, which is in charge of the project.

The material to be burned consists of asphalt, gravel, sand, shells, soil and cement.

The Environmental Protection Agency says the \$5.4 million project is a money-saver. Burning the soil on site will cost about \$350 per ton to \$600 per ton, compared with costs of up to \$3,000 per ton when the contaminated material must be transported.

We welcome a project that will clean up that Navy base site once and for all and accept assurances that the process will be monitored for safety on a 24-hour per day basis.

That sort of supervision is essential. This is the first use of the on-site burning process and safety precautions can't be overdone.