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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "CLEARING AWAY DIOXIN RESIDUE IN GULFPORT" NCBC
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Clearing away dioxin residue in Gulfport

An unclosed chapter of the Vietnam war, as some television viewers were reminded Monday night, is the personal injuries some veterans are suffering and others will suffer from exposure to Agent Orange, the defoliant used to clear away the jungles. The physical damages sometimes are many years in developing. Gulfport is a part of the Agent Orange story.

On the same day as the television movie about that suffering and veterans' efforts to obtain recognition of their problems and get help, a footnote to the Agent Orange story was being written at the Naval Construction Battalion Center. The Air Force is undertaking a \$5.4 million project to remove traces of the chemical from the building.

During the period while more than 840,000 gallons of the defoliant were stored at the CB base from 1967 to 1977, some of the barrels leaked dioxin, a toxic substance rushed into combat area use before all of its long-term effects were known or at least before the servicemen and the general public were told of those effects. Had the full dangers been known, the barrels stored at Gulfport undoubtedly would have been treated with much greater care.

Disposal of the poisons that remained at the base after the war was accomplished by incineration aboard the Dutch ship Vulcanus in the open waters of the Pacific Ocean nine years ago. One safety feature about the location of the burning is that if there were any poisons released in the stack emissions, the release took place in an isolated area, where the likelihood of any human contamination was minimal. That safety factor of isolation is not present in the current project.

The portable incinerator is different from the one aboard the Vulcanus, but it should be remembered that the ship did become contaminated in the burning at sea and had to be decontaminated afterwards. The Air Force is convinced that the portable incinerator now being tested at the CB site is capable of decontaminating the soil over 12 acres without endangering the population living near the base. Stack emissions, spokesmen say, will contain nothing worse than carbon dioxide and water.

The project generates mixed emotions. On the one hand, it is reassuring that the services recognize the soil has been contaminated by the leaks and that there is a health hazard in not taking action to cleanse the site. At the same time, this particular method is an experimental one.

Because of the experimental nature and because of the incinerator's proximity to populated areas, the officials in charge have a heavy responsibility to monitor every step of the process. The monitoring must be continual and careful throughout the 24-hours-per-day the machine will be working. Inspectors must assure that whatever is discharged into the air is not harmful to local residents and also must make certain that when the process is completed, what remains is clear of dangerous chemicals.

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