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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "JUST-TO-MAKE-SURE TEST SET FOR DIOXIN INCINERATOR"
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Just-to-make-sure test set for dioxin incinerator

By JOE O'KEEFE
STAFF WRITER

■ Air Force officials say the recent test of a portable dioxin incinerator at the Naval Construction Battalion Center in Gulfport was a success.

But the officials say they plan to run a second test early in May to ensure that the incinerator works properly. A similar incinerator malfunctioned recently at another clean-up site.

"We had planned to go ahead and start processing a full [load of contaminated dirt]," said Master Sgt. Jim Denney in a phone interview from Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida on Thursday. "We're having one more test burn."

Denney, along with project spokesman Air Force Capt. Terry Stoddart, will be at the Westside Community Center in Gulfport at 7:30 p.m. Monday to give citizens a report on the project.

The Seabee base has about 9,000 tons of dioxin-laced soil. The dioxin leaked into the ground from more than 17,000 barrels of the defoliant Agent Orange which were stored at the base during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Dioxin is a by-product of Agent Orange, which some medical experts have linked to skin disease, birth defects, cancer and other health problems.

Over 18 million gallons of the chemical were sprayed in and around combat areas in South Vietnam over a nine-year period.

The barrels of Agent Orange remaining at the base after the war were incinerated at sea in 1977. Air Force officials have maintained that the remnants of the chemical spilled or leaked onto the ground from the barrels pose no threat to surrounding communities or wildlife.

The Air Force Engineering and Services Center Laboratory at Tyndall Air Force Base is using the contaminated site at the Seabee base for a $5.4 million test project in which a large, portable incinerator is used to burn the dioxin in the dirt.

"What we're trying to do is find a cost-effective way to get the dioxins out of the soil," Denney said. Denney said

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the Seabee base site was chosen for the test because it had about the same amount of contaminated soil as the test amount required for incinerator certification by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The first test of the portable incinerator, conducted in December, reduced the amount of the dioxin in soil samples to less than one part per trillion, Air Force officials said in a prepared press release. That ratio is about 1,000 times less than the maximum ratio allowed by the EPA, which is one part per billion, the release said.

Once the project begins at full capacity, the incinerator will be kept running 24 hours a day for about 90 days to cook a 12-acre layer of dirt that varies from about 6 inches to 18 inches deep.

The gas-fired incinerator used at the Seabee base has been tested at another site in Eldorado, Ark.

However, Denney said a "sister incinerator" similar to the one being used at the Seabee base did not work properly in nine out of 18 recent tests. So Air Force officials decided to give the incinerator at Gulport a second try to make sure it will function properly.

The incinerator in Gulfport "did perform without the problems of its sister vault," Denney said. "But we wanted to go ahead and check it out one more time."

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