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David Hickey, left, and Karen Boles take samples from a ditch north of the Seabee Base in Gulfport, about a quarter mile east of Canal Road on 28th

Street in Gulfport. Both workers are with ABB Environmental Services. Earlier testing had found dioxins in levels higher than regulations allow.

Navy samples more soil in Gulfport

Officials believe Agent Orange is culprit

By **ANDREW EBNER**
THE SUN HERALD

■ GULFPORT — A Navy contractor on Saturday began taking soil samples from the northern edge of the Naval Construction Battalion Base in Gulfport near Canal Road.

The Navy is testing for dioxins in the soil along a ditch that runs under

28th Street.

Basewide testing that ended in December found dioxins along the ditch in levels higher than regulations allow.

"We're taking more samples, trying to find out the source," said Nancy Brooks, base spokeswoman.

Brooks said she didn't know when the base would have results, but that

the Navy is "trying to do a real quick turnaround."

Brooks said ABB Environmental Services will take soil samples again today and, if need be, over the next couple of days.

The Navy will use the information to determine if the dioxins are in high enough amounts and toxicity to pose a health risk and to determine how the area needs to be cleaned up.

The dioxins are believed to have come from Agent Orange, a herbicide

last used in Vietnam to make the enemy more visible. The herbicide was stored on the base in barrels, some of which leaked during handling and incinerated at sea in 1977.

Dioxins comprise a group of chemicals, some more toxic than others. The most toxic dioxin is believed to cause cancer and immune and reproductive disorders at relatively low levels. But base officials have said it is unlikely that neighbors were exposed to the chemicals.