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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "NAVY'S NEIGHBORS AFRAID ITS GARBAGE IS CAUSING
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• METRO •

NEW ORLEANS

Navy's neighbors afraid its garbage is causing cancer

By The Associated Press

LONG BEACH, Miss. — Bill Robbins fears the battles he and his neighbors have had with cancer may be linked to the nearby Naval Construction Battalion Center.

Tests this month revealed that soil in and around the base may contain a higher concentration of dioxins than federal hazardous waste standards recommend. The base is about a mile from Robbins' neighborhood.

Officials have said they do not know whether the dioxins found are toxic, or if there is enough waste to be hazardous.

The toxic herbicide Agent Orange was kept on the base, and some of the barrels leaked during handling when the herbicide was incinerated at sea in 1977. The storage area was cleaned in the 1980s, but some contaminated soil may have remained.

Dioxin is a general term for a

class of 75 organic compounds that are byproducts in the manufacturing of chemicals. Thirteen of those compounds are considered highly toxic.

Robbins, 61, fears that dioxin could have traveled down the bayou from the base to a lake behind his home.

"We've had cancer completely around this circle for years," he said.

Robbins has lived on Linwood Circle for 28 years. He has battled prostate cancer since 1989 and his wife died from breast cancer in 1993.

Stephanie Herring, 42, said she is in remission after a year of treatment for lung cancer.

"There's too many cases of cancer in a one-mile block. There's all different types of cancer," she said. "I don't know if it's related or not."

Jerry Banks of the state Department of Environmental Quality's Pollution Control office said the risk is minimal.

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STEPHANIE HERRING,
in remission

Banks said even if dioxins in the soil are toxic, people would have to come into close contact with the soil every day to increase their risk of cancer or physical disorders.

A link between cancer and dioxin would be difficult to establish, said Mike Greenwell, a spokesman for the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry in Atlanta.

"There are so many other factors," Greenwell said. "Cancer is many different diseases that has many causes. It's difficult to pinpoint to one specific thing."

The base has begun an extensive sampling program to find and remove any dangerous dioxin deposits.

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