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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "STATE: CENTER'S DIOXIN DANGER NOT GREAT" NCBC
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State: Center's dioxin danger not great

DEQ official sees no real reason for immediate concern

By PATRICK PETERSON
THE SUN HERALD

■ GULFPORT — Dioxin found outside the Naval Construction Battalion Center doesn't put residents at risk for cancer, state officials said Friday.

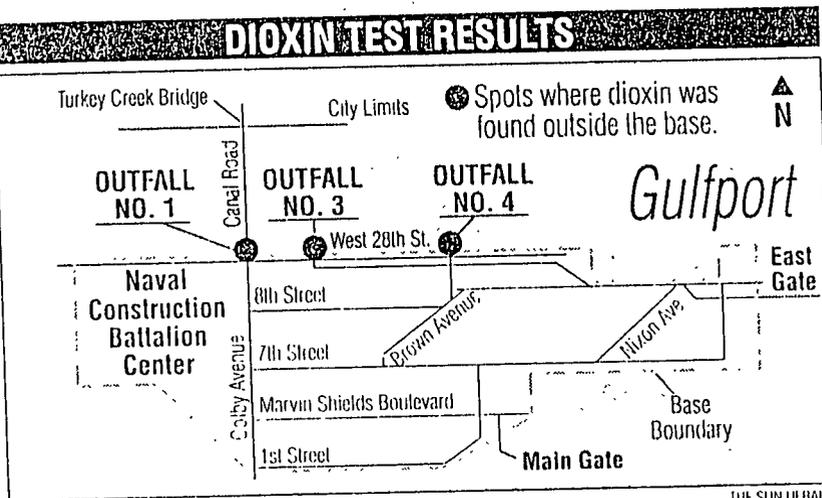
"We don't see any immediate danger," said Jerry Banks, acting chief of the hazardous waste division of the state Department of Environmental Quality's Office of Pollution Control.

Some samples exceeded federal minimums at three sites on 28th Street, outside the center's boundary. However, at a site ¼-mile away, dioxin levels did not exceed federal minimums.

The federal minimum is 4.7 parts per trillion. With daily exposure at this rate, dioxin will cause cancer in one person in a million over a 70-year period of exposure.

"It's a very conservative number," said Banks.

In December, tests found 150 ppt in a ditch inside the base near Canal Road and 28th Street. The most recent tests showed 91, 58, 59, 52,



18, 13, 29 and 6.4 ppt — up to 20 times the minimum level. Eight of 13 samples were above the minimum levels at the site just east of Canal Road, a site called Outfall No. 3.

At a site near Canal Road called Outfall No. 1, three of six samples were up to three times the federal minimum. And at a site near 53rd Avenue, two samples were slightly above the minimum at a site labeled Outfall No. 4.

A short distance away from the base, samples far below the minimum safe levels were found at the Canal Road bridge over Turkey Creek.

Samples read 1.1 and .21 ppt — well below the 4.7 ppt minimum.

As expected, the heavy dioxin had not traveled far from its presumed sources.

"There were no surprises at all," said Gordon Crane, environmental program manager for the center. "We knew the heaviest stuff was around Outfall No. 3."

The dioxin likely came from the herbicide Agent Orange that was stored on the base from the 1960s until 1977, when it was burned at sea. Some of the barrels leaked during burning. The contaminated soil was

burned in 1987 and 1988.

Dioxin binds tightly to soil and only gets into humans if they eat, breath or come in contact with contaminated soil, said Crane.

"It does float if the sediment moves," he added.

The center has installed 12 sediment traps in drainage ditches to stop any dioxin that might be traveling off the base.

The state DEQ will decide whether the contaminated soil must be removed or whether it can remain where it is without posing a health risk. Some scientists feel dioxin is less dangerous than previously believed. The DEQ will use an upcoming Environmental Protection Agency report to determine whether there is a health risk to the community.

While officials have uncovered no "immediate danger" from the dioxin, some residents are concerned that the dioxin could affect their property values or their health.

"I want them to test it to see that I'm safe," said 64-year-old Bessie Currie, who owns property south of the center. Due to the patterns of water flow, officials don't believe dioxin has moved south of the base. However, Currie would like proof that her property, which she wants to sell, is not contaminated.