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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "DEQ ORDERS DIOXIN TESTS AT NAVY BASE" NCBC GULFPORT
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DEQ orders dioxin tests at Navy base

■ Agent Orange was stored at the Gulfport base during the Vietnam War.

By Bruce Reid
Clarion-Ledger Staff Writer

The state Department of Environmental Quality has ordered extensive testing around a Gulfport Navy base to ensure that dangerous levels of dioxin do not exist off the installation.

The DEQ's 13-page written order requires the Navy and the Air Force to test soil, water, sediment and fish near the Naval Construction Battalion Center. Potentially dangerous levels of dioxin have been found in soil at the border of the 1,100-acre base, which was used to store millions of gallons of the dioxin-containing defoliant Agent Orange during the Vietnam War.

"We've got to know that there's not a problem out there," said Jerry Banks, chief of the DEQ's hazardous waste division. "We can't take the chance of letting this lie and hoping that there is not a problem."

Rep. Frances Fredericks, D-Gulfport, said the base has been responsive to residents' concerns.

"I would like the testing to continue to make sure there isn't a hazard," said Fredericks, who lives about a half-mile from the base.

Dioxin is a generic name for a family of chemicals that are unwanted byproducts of manufacturing processes and combustion. Some of the chemicals are known to cause cancer, birth defects and liver damage in laboratory animals.

The DEQ's order was issued Feb. 14. Military environmental officials are scheduled to discuss the order tonight with an advisory board of citizens living near the base.

The Navy base stored Agent Orange for nearby Keesler Air Force Base until the military suspended the defoliant's use in 1977. Since then, both services have focused on cleaning up contaminated storage areas and sampling on the base.

Gordon Crane, environmental program manager at the base, said Wednesday that cleanup crews have removed soil with trace amounts of dioxin near the base's northwestern border. Dioxin levels 30 times higher than considered safe in soil have been detected at the base's northwestern boundary, but the levels a half-mile north of the boundary were below the

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