

32212-000

13.08.00.0006

Cleanup delays criticized

Jacksonville official takes on the Navy

By John Burr
Staff writer

The city's top environmental official is criticizing the Navy for delaying cleanups of hazardous waste sites at Jacksonville Naval Air Station for up to three years.

"My one big problem is that in areas where they know they have a problem, they are doing almost nothing in terms of a cleanup," said Don Bayly, chief of the city Bio-Environmental Services Division.

"We're all worried about the [St. Johns] River," Bayly said yesterday. "All these things can leach into the river from rain or the groundwater, further hurting its condition."

"He has a point," said Bill Roche, environmental protection director at the base, "but it's important to realize that we've come up against some pretty big problems."

Delays in federal funding, a lack of environmental contractors, and innumerable time-consuming studies associated with industrial waste cleanups were the problems Roche cited.

Bayly's criticisms were aired during a Tuesday briefing at the naval base for local, state and federal environmental officials. He did commend the Navy for an extensive testing program, which has dispelled worries about many sites.

A Navy contractor has narrowed down the sites that may need cleanups to seven areas, six of them around the Naval Air Rework Facility. In 1984, 38 potential chemical dumpsites were identified at the base.

Bayly identified three areas where he says a proven problem has existed for years without an adequate response from the Navy:

- Disposal pits: Solvents, paint and paint strippers were buried in the pits from the late 1930s until the late 1970s. This area is considered the largest chemical waste dump on the base.

- No cleanup work has been done at the site since late 1984, after a small

(See JACKSONVILLE, Page B-5)

Jacksonville official hits Navy for delays

(From Page B-1)

creek was dammed to prevent chemicals from contaminating the St. Johns River, Roche said. Lack of funds and qualified contractors caused the delay, he said.

But the Navy will present a decontamination plan to environmental regulators in June. If it is approved, the cleanup can begin, Roche said. Funding is available for the work.

- Gas Hill: Navy officials discovered jet fuel in the soil and groundwater surrounding fuel tanks near the base runway three years ago. Bayly said the fuel probably has been washed into the St. Johns River.

Recent testing of the groundwater failed to find any jet fuel.

"In other words, the attitude is: If you wait long enough, these things will clean themselves up," Bayly said. "I don't like that."

Roche said the groundwater will be tested again once the water table rises. If the fuel is found again, a procedure to clean the groundwater can be begun.

After extensive testing for leaks in fuel lines leading from the tanks, the Navy discovered that two fuel tanks were leaking. The two tanks have been drained, and the Navy is determining whether it would be cheaper to replace or repair the tanks.

- Naval Air Rework Facility storm drains: High levels of oil and grease from several storm drains have been polluting the St. Johns River for years, Bayly said. Navy officials said nothing at Tuesday's briefing about how they planned to stop this pollution, he said.

A contractor is excavating the storm drains and searching for pollution sources, Roche said. He said much of the pollution is probably overflowing from obsolete oil and grease traps. When found, those overflows will be rerouted to a water treatment system, Roche said.