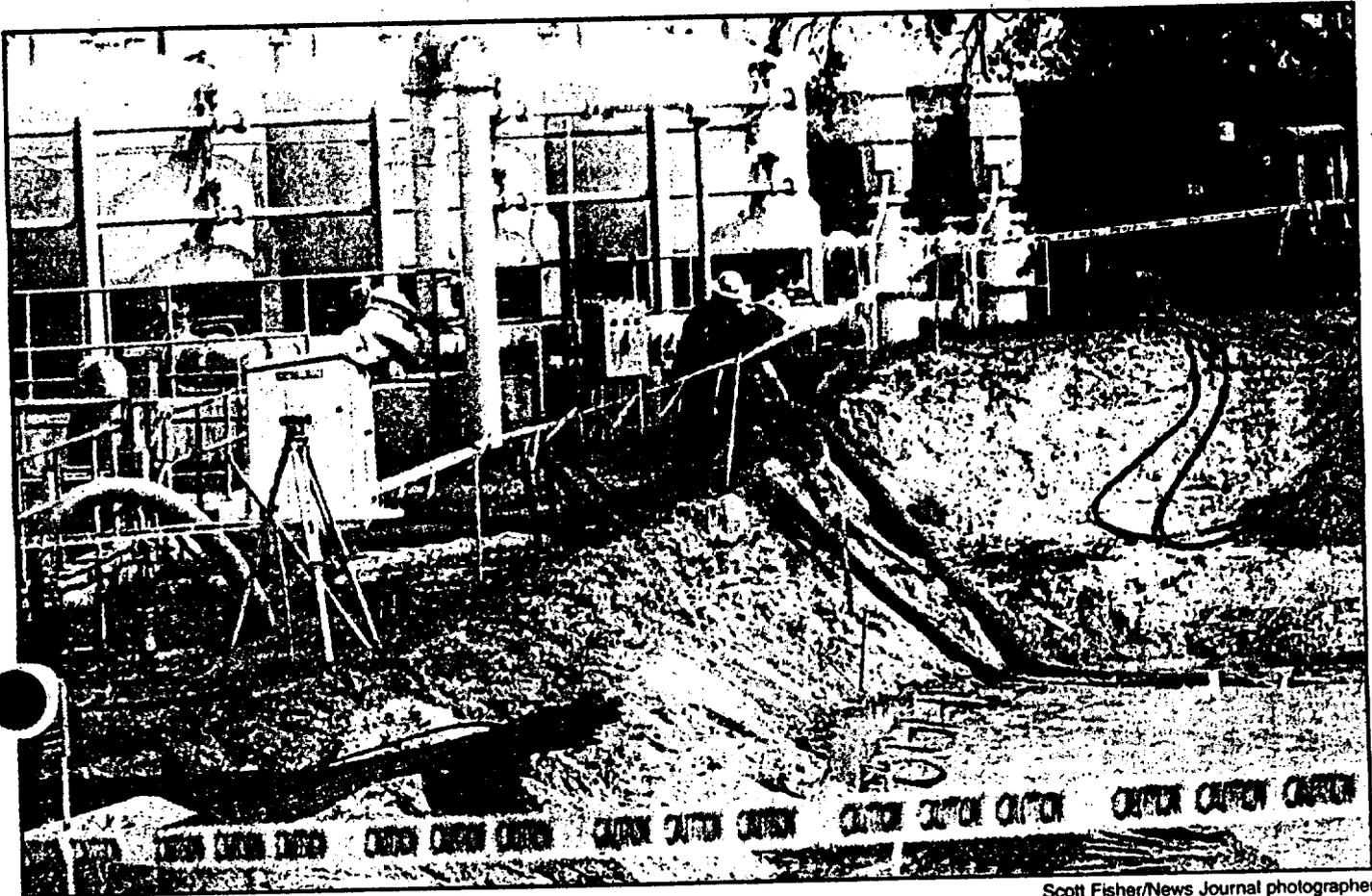
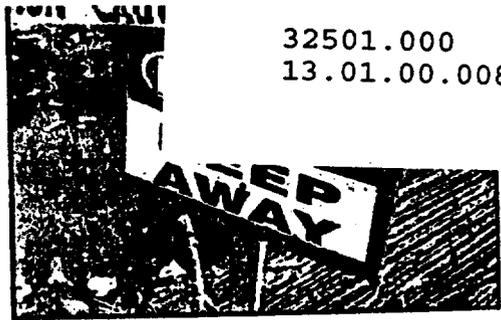


Exposure to toxics creates questions about NAS safety

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Scott Fisher/News Journal photographer

Workers pump water from a site on Pensacola Naval Air Station in preparation for installation of a new water filtration system at Chevalier Field where the Naval Air Technical Training Center will be based.

At issue: Workers without protective gear

By Charles Ashby
News Journal staff writer

The last thing on Johnny Whitfield's mind was that he'd be exposed to hazardous waste.

Now it's all he can think about. Whitfield and at least seven other construction workers who are helping build the \$300 million Naval Air Technical Training Center at Pensacola Naval Air Station have been exposed to small amounts of methylene chloride on the job.

While base officials say the incident was minor and poses no 3-term danger to the workers, exposure to hazardous

wastes raises questions of why the Navy failed to keep the construction workers safe from toxic chemicals.

The incident about a month ago prompted the Southern Division Naval Facilities Engineering Command at Charleston Naval Base in South Carolina and the Navy Judge Advocate General's Office to investigate why the men were working so closely to three hazardous waste sites without wearing protective gear.

Those sites are three of 44 hazardous waste "hot spots" on the 6,000-acre air station, most of which are on the Environ-

COMING FRIDAY

This is the first of a two-part series on hazardous materials at Pensacola Naval Air Station.

FRIDAY: What Navy officials plan to do to clean up the remaining toxic waste "hot spots" around the base.

mental Protection Agency's list of Superfund sites for priority cleanup.

"The only thing that really

made me mad over the whole deal was the fact they didn't tell us it was a polluted area," said Whitfield, a Pensacola resident who was operating a bulldozer at the site and didn't have as much direct contact with the contaminated area as the other workers.

"I had little spots come up on me that sort of looked like mosquito bites except they would have little puss in the middle of them. As soon as that busted, they cleared up," he said. "We think we were wrongly sent in there, because we should have known before we went in there

See EXPOSURE, 14A

Exposure to toxic., leads to questions about safety at NAS

at safety and hazardous chemical guide.

Dr. Roger Inman, the state toxicologist, said methylene chloride is highly flammable and highly toxic. He said it is a respiratory irritant and workers will have health problems later in life.

"If you get enough of it, it can cause death because it metabolizes into carbon monoxide," Inman said from his office. "The concern is what they did to."

Tests

Neil Penford, manager of Buckeye Excavating Inc. that was hired to do the ground work at the center, said all his workers were tested for contamination and all came up negative.

Penford said the firm is making sure its workers, most of whom are from the Pensacola area, wear protective gear — gloves, boots and overalls — before going into or near the contaminated areas.

"We're just taking precautions with the workers and with ourselves," he said. "And as it sits at the moment, there seems to be no particular reason for any more concern than what we have."

Buckeye, based out of Zephyrhills near Tampa, is a subcontractor for the Bethesda, Md.-based George Hyman Construction Co. Hyman won the contract in February to build the training center.

Delayed testing

Whitfield, who tested negative for methylene chloride, said neither Buckeye nor Hyman asked for workers to be tested for contamination until weeks after the incident, "time enough for the stuff, maybe, to go through our system."

One of the workers "had on his doctor's report, 'toxic exposure,'" Whitfield said. "But he had been tested early — something like two weeks ago — so it wasn't quite all out of his system yet."

The company believes they were exposed to it more than a year ago, the Navy says and were looking for an attorney Wednesday to help them find out what the cleanup might be and how much.

As proof, Whitfield said he used to review the contaminated area's health and safety that was half a page long, and it was mostly just methylene chloride.

At five sites built by Hyman, it is to be used by oil companies and refuse. The cost of the site is \$3.5 million.

Hyman hired Riede Smith Environmental Technologies of Mobile to do the work. That firm also was called in to finish the ground work started by Buckeye at the waste water treatment facility.

spokeswoman Michele Harrison.

The workers were digging foundations for waste treatment filters as part of a project to convert the treatment facility into a sewage treatment plant for the training center, which is to open next year.

The Navy stopped the work a day later when officials realized ground water was being pumped to the wrong place.

"We didn't stop because there was contamination," said Navy Lt. Kelly McCarthy, head of the department's environmental division. "We stopped because we were pumping to the wrong place."

Exposure unknown

The Navy didn't know anyone had been exposed to hazardous wastes until three weeks later, when the workers complained.

Something Special?

Arts Festival is an addition to a collection.

STUDENTS

Schools will spend \$31,000 on schools.

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Optim

limit contrasted with remarks earlier in the day, he said Wall Street investors told Republicans that "the market would shrug it off" if the government went into default.

at conflicts with the views of Democrats and most economists, say a federal failure to pay its debtors would spark higher interest rates and an unforeseen reaction by financial markets.

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