

# A&M research indicates prime source of tar seeps in Gulf of Mexico

An A&M study of tar seeps in the Gulf of Mexico indicates a prime source for this "natural pollution" is an area off the coast of Brownsville.

The university's Oceanography Department just completed the first year of research involving the occurrence of natural hydrocarbons. The project is sponsored by the A&M Sea Grant Program and several oil companies.

Dr. Richard A. Geyer, department head, said 11 oil companies, including three new ones, have

provided financial support for second-year operations. They are Atlantic Richfield, Chevron, Cities Service, Conoco, Gulf, Humble, Marathon, Mobil, Phillips, Sun and Tenneco.

William E. Sweet Jr., research associate coordinating the project, emphasized the lumps of tar found floating in the northwest portion of the gulf were not refined products.

High dissolved gas anomalies have been detected in areas of the gulf over shallow salt domes, and

traces of oil have been found at these localities, Sweet reported. Faults, which are cracks in the bottom sediment caused by the rising salt, allow oil and gas which has been trapped below to migrate to the surface, he explained.

Tar lumps have been found within the sediments and staining

shells at many sites. Three years ago tar was found in a core taken from the Sigsbee Knolls.

Since all of this hydrocarbon material that has been found in the sediment is lighter than water, Sweet emphasized it could not have sunk down from the surface but must have come up from a natural pool from below

the sediments.

He said the major purposes of the project are to locate the source of the seeps, determine the nature and the amount of seepage and the chemical composition of the escaping material.

A&M's two largest research vessels, the R/V Alaminos and the R/V Orca, have been used for the study.

Drift cards are being used to determine current movement from the seep site in order to determine what happens to the oil once it is in the water. Sweet said some cards have been found along the

Padre Island Beach and northward toward Louisiana.

Sweet noted the Coast Guard also has been cooperating in the project, with the cutters Durable, Reliance and Valiant dropping cards on occasion at selected points.

In the coming year the program will be expanded to include regular beach patrols to determine the amount and type of tar coming ashore. To determine the amount of tar floating in the gulf, Sweet said a net will be towed through the water at a constant rate. A meter will record

the amount of water flowing through the net, and after a specific time interval, the net will be hauled aboard and any tar that is present will be removed, weighed and analyzed.

## Newell named associate dean of the College of Engineering

Dr. Paul H. Newell Jr., who developed and heads the bioengineering program at A&M, became associate dean of the College of Engineering Jan. 1.

Dean Fred J. Benson said Dr. Newell is a professional engineer "with very fine ideas about developing engineering programs and a man of great competence. He's the best man available."

Dr. Newell, 38, will be responsible for engineering graduate programs and in charge when Dean Benson is away from the campus.

He succeeds Dr. Richard Wainardi, now assistant vice presi-

dent for academic affairs.

Dr. Newell will retain the position of professor and head of the bioengineering program, which A&M proposes to develop into the only degree program of its kind in the Southwest.

The Nashville, Tenn., native also is professor of mechanical engineering, a member of the A&M Graduate College faculty and professor of biomedical engineering at Baylor College of Medicine, Houston.

Dr. Newell said his primary effort is "to assist in making engineering education at Texas A&M the best."

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