

TAMU to develop oil-pollution detector

The U. S. Coast Guard has awarded a \$96,581 contract to the Remote Sensing Center at TAMU to develop an unmanned oil-pollution detector.

The detector is to be small, rugged and lightweight with the capability to scan an area 24 hours a day for one year without maintenance.

Dr. John W. Rouse, Jr., Remote Sensing Center director, said provisions of the award call for the center to produce a single-wave-length laser prototype sensor.

"This device will provide an alarm to a Coast Guard alert or cleanup station when an oil spill is detected," Rouse said.

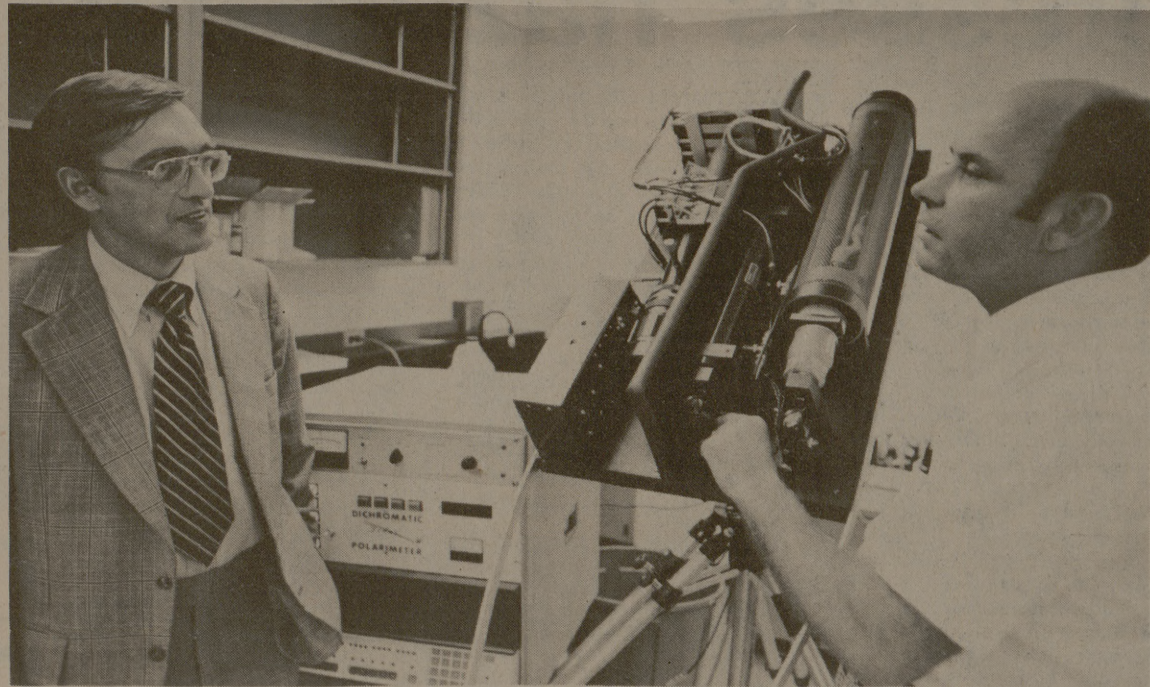
"Essentially the detector uses the basic components of a computer, a small special function micro-processor that is miniaturized and solid state," he said. "This allows the oil-pollution data to be processed digitally and instantaneously."

"It will be the only 'in site' oil-spill sensor in existence that can make measurements 24 hours a day in almost any kind of weather," Rouse said.

The monitor is designed to be mounted on bridges and other structures to monitor rivers and harbor waters. The laser checks on and below the water surface for suspended material. Oil and other material on the water alter the signal and modify the return.

The sensor's electronic signals are turned into digital words and passed into a computer for analysis.

Extending the idea, Rouse and his research team predict that a number of these monitors could be linked to a central facility for a picture of conditions in a large area.



Dr. John Rouse, left, and Bill Hulse examine a pollution-detection device.

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Researchers to study sulfur oxide

Sulfur products daily are belched into the earth's atmosphere by cars and by industry. These oxides of sulfur are suspended in the air and are a matter of concern to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The EPA this week awarded an additional \$10,000 for Dr. Jack H. Lunsford to identify the conditions under which sulfur oxides form on airborne particles. The particles are the products of burning coal or any fossil fuel containing sulfur.

"It's known that these absorbed oxides of sulfur cause respiratory problems in humans and animals," Lunsford said. "They cause irritation in the lungs and make it hard to breathe."

"Current tests by the EPA for emission control don't distinguish between sulfate and sulfite ions," he said. "Air quality tests only give the total amount of sulfur present without distinguishing the actual form of the sulfur oxide."

"We need to find out which chemical state is important to the biology of humans and animals," Lunsford said. "Unless we do, the air quality control agencies might be setting the limit on one oxide while the important chemical species might be something else."

"Our research will show that some of the ions predominate under a particular set of conditions," he said. "This will then help the EPA interpret the results of other research groups on the respiratory irritation."

Lunsford's research team uses infrared spectroscopy to determine the nature of chemical compounds.

"Our unique contribution is to apply this type of spectroscopy to a study of aerosol samples," he said. "The interest in air-pollution problems has made it worthwhile to apply the technique in this area."

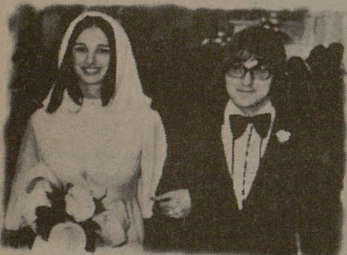
Washington was British army Colonel

July 9, 1755 — On this day ... two hundred and twenty years ago ... Col. George Washington was on the staff of British Gen. Edward Braddock during the French and Indian Wars. The British troops were ambushed and would have suffered a total disaster if it were not for Col. Washington's heroic efforts in rallying the survivors and conducting a safe retreat.

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