

Near Hawaiian islands

Scientists study mining impact

A group of TAMU scientists are scheduled to help conduct a marine environmental impact study near the Hawaiian Islands.

The federally funded "Deep-Ocean Mining Environmental Study (DOMES)" is being done to identify potential problems from the mining of manganese nodules.

Dr. Sayed Z. El-Sayed and Dr. T. Ichijo, of the Department of

Oceanography, and Dr. G. A. Franceschini, of the Department of Meteorology, last week attended a meeting in Seattle Wash. to discuss cruise plans with other principal investigators from the University of Washington, University of Hawaii and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration.

Other TAMU investigators include biochemist Dr. Nestor Bottino,

statistician Dr. C. E. Gates, and oceanographer Dr. G. A. Fryxell.

Scheduled to leave Seattle Aug. 21 aboard the NOAA research vessel "Oceanographer", the team will conduct physical, chemical and biological oceanographic studies south and east of Hawaii.

"Probably much of the mining will have to be done with a vacuum dredge, which means a huge plume of bottom material will be dumped into the water column to settle out," El-Sayed said. "The main goal of the project is to identify these environmental problems early enough to produce a timely response to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act."

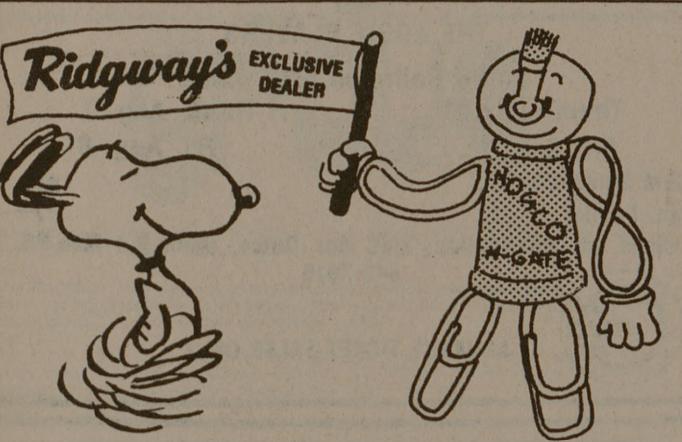
"Now it is illegal for any country to do anything to the ocean or ocean floor without an environmental impact study," he said.

"After the samples are taken, we will study them and set up baseline levels of marine life and contamination," he said. "Then next year, March through December, we will return to determine the effect of discharge on the marine populations at the mining sites."

"The funding for the first three months for us is \$75,000 with an understanding that the additional work will have substantially higher funding," El-Sayed said.

The project will look at zooplankton, upper-water-column chemical oceanography, and upper-water-column physical oceanography in order to evaluate the magnitude that deep-ocean mining might have on the marine environment.

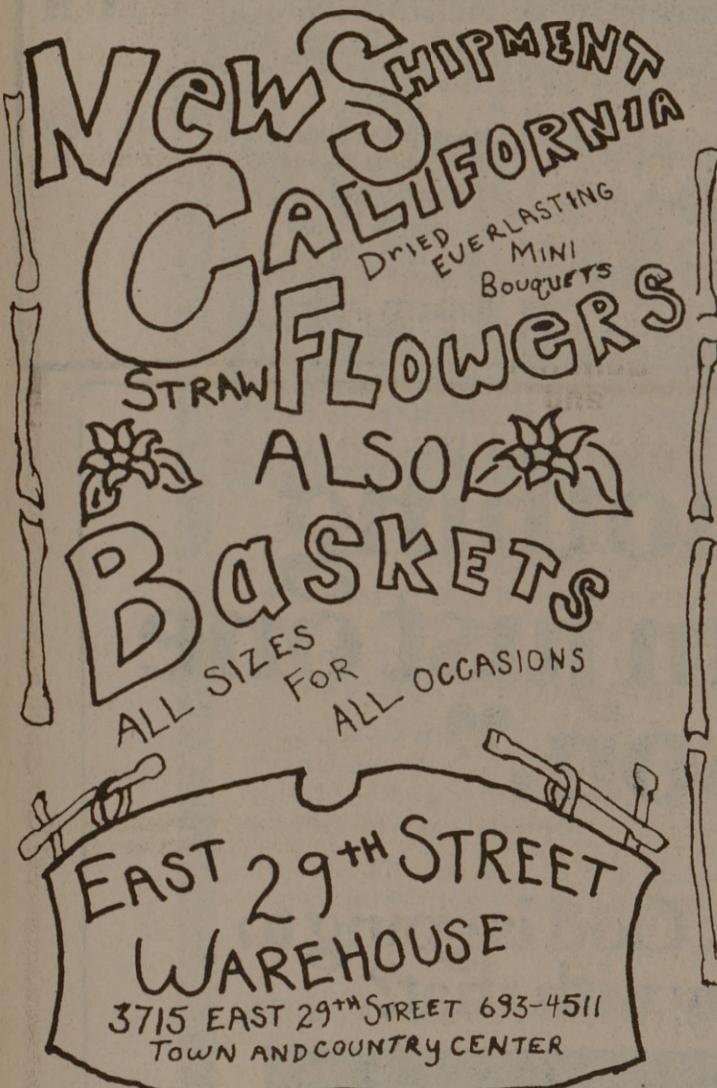
"After the mining operation is started we will place more than half the observation stations downstream (due to the currents) from the work site," El-Sayed said. "This would characterize the influences of the deep-sea mining on the phytoplankton. This material compared with the pre-mining studies will show what damage, if any, that has occurred as a result."



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Fish go into space for inner ear experiment

Twenty-five fish from TAMU went into space last week as part of the Apollo-Soyuz mission.

The month-old killifish, raised at TAMU, may tell researchers about the workings of the inner ear when subjected to the zero gravity of outer space.

Dr. Karl Kuchnow, TAMU biologist and project director, said that the fish were sent aloft in five sealed containers aboard the Apollo craft. Each container carried a slightly different group of killifish. Each group had been raised with a different visual background.

Astronauts Thomas Stafford, Vance Brand and Deke Slayton spent part of their time filming and recording how the fish adapted to the weightless state.

Kuchnow said that on earth the fish had two basic cues for orienting themselves — sight and gravity. With gravity no longer a factor, the fish had to adapt themselves visually.

The five containers held fish raised with a normal background since hatching, a second group with no sight, one raised with horizontal bars as a background, the fourth with a vertical-bar background and the last with a black background.

No quarantine was expected for the containers after splashdown. NASA officials were expected to take them from the capsule within seven hours of splashdown and have

PV researcher pinpoints safe cadmium level

PRairie View — A PVAMU researcher has determined how much cadmium can be contained in sandy soil before harmful amounts are transmitted through plants to humans.

Dr. Gene Brans of PVAMU said that two years' soil study in the Houston area has revealed that a concentration of one part-per-million (PPM) of cadmium in sandy soil is the highest safe level.

One PPM, he said, is about equal to two pounds of the metal concentrated in an acre of soil plowed eight inches deep.

"This level of one PPM causes the level of cadmium taken in by plant life to rise to a point that might be harmful to humans consuming the plant food," he said.

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