

A&M oceanographers find method to detect oil

Texas A&M University oceanographers believe they have devised a method for detecting new deposits of oil in the ocean floors.

B. B. Bernard, research assistant at Texas A&M, will present a paper describing the research, at the fall annual meeting of the American Geophysical Union in San Francisco Dec. 6-10. Drs. J. M. Brooks and W. M. Sackett, also of the Oceanography Department, collaborated on the paper.

The essence of the process is that

heavy concentrations of gases that are not entirely methane, found in sediment samples, might indicate that petroleum deposits are somewhere nearby.

These various gases, once they are produced, migrate upward through sediment where they are available to probing scientists. As an initial step, scientists have to take enough core samples and monitor enough of the sediment's gas content to be able to tell what the normal levels might be.

"Once a background level has

been established we can start to look for the exception," Bernard said.

"Then we can tell where there is more gas than normal and if it is the product of decaying matter or if it is from material that has been turned into petroleum by thermal changes deep beneath the floor of the oceans.

"Abnormally high concentration of dissolved gas in the near surface sediment imply the seepage upward of older gas the origin of which can be determined by its composition," he added.

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