

Local

Nuclear waste disposal may become problem in June



Photo by Mary Anne Snowden

Texas A&M University Nuclear Science Center does research and development with radioactive materials. The center is expected to be left with a disposal problem when the

By TRACEY BUCHANAN
Battalion Reporter

Texas A&M University may be left with accumulating barrels of low-level nuclear waste when Nuclear Sources and Services Inc. goes out of business in June, says Dr. Richard Neff, director of the campus Radiological Safety Office.

The company is the only one in Texas that picks up nuclear waste and transports it to disposal sites.

Robert Gallagher, president of the Houston company, told Neff last week his company couldn't stay in business if it had to meet regulations proposed in a bill before the Texas Legislature.

Rules that would allow nuclear waste disposal sites in the state for "Texas only" were approved by the Texas Senate last week. There are no disposal sites in Texas and only three in the nation.

"Until a site in Texas could be opened up, or unless someone else went into the business, we would have to be doing something with it (nuclear waste) ourselves," Neff said.

The disposal site in Washington is the only one of the three sites currently available for deliveries of nuclear waste from Texas A&M, Neff said, and they have strict regulations.

Nuclear Sources and Services proposed a waste management site in Leon County, but the Legislature has directed the Texas Department of Health not to approve new sites until June or until new licensing laws are written.

Radioactive material is collected in 55-gallon drums from about 200 labs on campus, Neff said.

Two hundred to 250 of these barrels are collected in a year, he said. Disposal of each drum costs the University \$150 to \$175, he said.

Texas A&M stores the barrels in an area near the Nuclear Science Center close to Easterwood Airport. A metal building is under construction to accommodate the overflow of barrels, Neff said. A portable building is all the storage space the University has now.

Neff estimated that 800 people at Texas A&M are actively involved in work with radioactive materials, including faculty and graduate students.

Todd Research and Technical Division, which had the University's contract last year, closed its waste reprocessing in February 1980. The Battalion reported in June 1980 that Texas A&M "temporarily curtailed the handling of radioactive waste from research labs."

Neff said a decision about cutting Texas A&M research using radioactive material has not been made.

The low-level waste Texas A&M generates are paper, glass and gloves used in work with radioactive material, organic scintillator fluid, used as a tracer in chemical reactions and in animal bodies; and the bodies of animals, used in research and experiments.

The two most common types of radioactive material used on campus are tritium, which has a half life of 10-12 years, and carbon 14, which has a half life of 1,620 years, Neff said. The half life is the time it takes for one unit of radioactive material to decay to half of its original amount.

Neff said tritium and carbon 14

are among the least toxic radioactive materials.

"We can store it longer here (at the University), and we can try to gather enough of it up to make our own shipment to the disposal site, which is not something we really

want to do," Neff said.

The University would have to use a large truck to take radioactive material to the disposal site, he said. It is inspected at the site and "the least little thing wrong and they send the whole truckload back," Neff said.

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Aggie Club organizer, 83, dies

Funeral services for John Chester Mayfield, who helped organize Texas A&M University's Association of Former Students and the Aggie Club, were held in Houston Tuesday.

Mayfield, who died Saturday at 83, was cadet colonel of the Corps of Cadets from 1922 to 1923 and was instrumental in helping organize the Association of Former Students in 1925 — the group that grew out of an earlier graduate organization.

The class of '23 graduate also helped establish the Aggie Club of which he was a former president and lifetime director. The club contributed more than \$2 million to the University's athletic program last year.

For his services, Mayfield was inducted into the Texas A&M Hall of Honor.

At the time of his death, Mayfield was director of R.M. Mayfield Constructors, Inc., of

Houston. Earlier in his career he worked for Kirby Lumber Co. and Anderson, Clayton and Co. In 1955 he founded a general contracting firm bearing his name, retiring 10 years later.

Mayfield served as an officer in the Army Air Corps during World

War I and subsequently enrolled at Texas A&M.

The Texas native was born in Dodge in Walker County but lived in Houston for about 50 years before moving to Conroe seven years ago.

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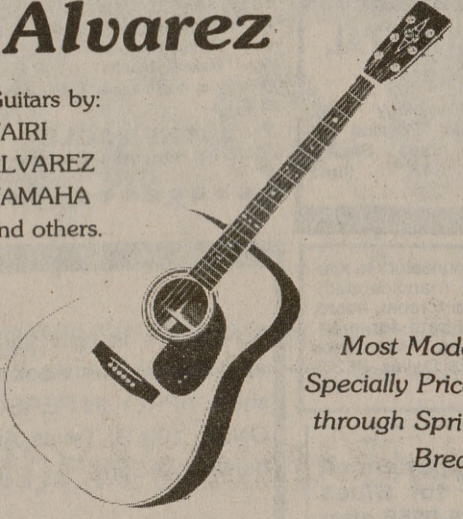
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