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Toxic waste cleanups delayed

By Steve Patterson
Times-Union staff writer

Cleanups of toxic waste sites in Jacksonville and around the country are facing indefinite delays as the federal government's Superfund program is curtailed for lack of money.

Cleanup at a Westside oil business was temporarily halted this month because of budget problems.

That work has resumed, but two other projects the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had planned in Jacksonville and Brunswick, Ga. are at a standstill.

"I have no idea if or when any money will be available," said Michael Arnett, an EPA manager overseeing cleanup at the bankrupt Brunswick Wood Preserving Co., where preservative chemicals have seeped into ground water. "We're a program that does not have any resources."

Also in question is a \$20 million project at another lumber treatment site, the closed Coleman-Evans Wood Preserving Co. in Jacksonville's Whitehouse area.

Work at many locations will continue unabated, paid for by businesses that have some responsibili-

ty for the sites' past pollution.

But money is short at sites where polluters are bankrupt or have disappeared. Government officials make few promises about when, or whether, they'll fix those sites.

"We don't have the resources, and we're not going to be able to meet our commitments to the communities," EPA Administrator Carol Browner said.

EPA's annual funding remains undetermined almost four months into the government's fiscal year, due to budget disagreements between President Clinton and Congress. Browner, citing House budget proposals, said her agency stands to lose up to 36 percent of the money it normally spends on toxic waste projects.

Environmental activists assert that public opinion is driving some members of the House's Republican majority away from such cuts. But they contend some key congressional leaders remain committed to cuts that could cause long-term damage to cleanup projects.

"They simply don't like EPA," said Gregory Wetstone, legislative

Funding Superfund

How budget problems at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have affected Jacksonville hazardous waste cleanups:

DELAYED

■ Coleman-Evans Wood Preserving Co., Celery Avenue in Whitehouse. A \$20 million cleanup was planned but isn't funded.

■ Holloway Waste Oil Co., Guthrie Road in Pickettville. Initial \$1 million cleanup halted for two weeks this month, under way again.

PRIVATELY FUNDED

(Unaffected)

■ Pickettville Road landfill, Northwest Jacksonville.

■ Yellow Water Road PCB dump site, near Baldwin.

■ Whitehouse oil pits, Westside.

■ Hipps Road landfill, Westside.

NAVY CLEANUPS

(Dependent on Pentagon budget)

■ Jacksonville Naval Air Station, discarded solvents and industrial waste.

■ Cecil Field Naval Air Station, discarded solvents and industrial waste.

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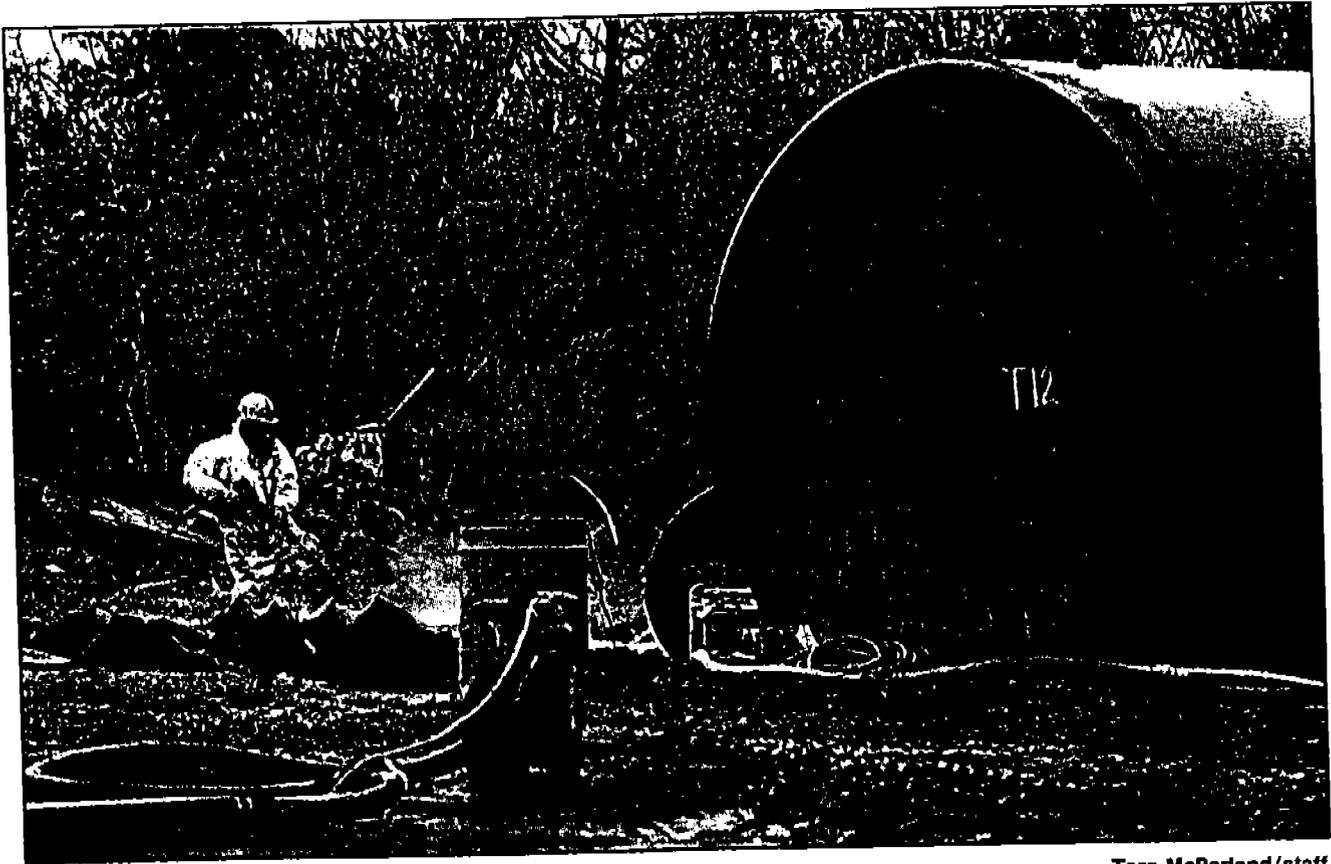
— Sue Bashford/staff

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— Tara McParland/staff
Rob Repasz, an EPA contractor, washes scrap metal at a Superfund site on Guthrie Road in Pickettville.

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Superfund not invincible to budget woës

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director for the Natural Resources Defense Council. "It's very dicey at this point."

Site work has also been hampered by the recent government shutdown, which affected toxic sites well after government office workers returned to the job.

Crews trucking oil and toxic PCBs from Holloway Waste Oil in Pickettville were idled for two weeks this month. They resumed work last week, said Terry Stillman, EPA's on-scene coordinator.

To keep the most important cleanups moving, EPA officials are prioritizing critical projects.

EPA's funding problems, how-

ever, have not affected cleanups at two of the city's Superfund sites at Jacksonville Naval Air Station and Cecil Field NAS. The Navy is continuing work at these sites, said Stuart Johnston, public affairs officer for the Navy's Jacksonville environmental command.

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