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Huntsville Tim

Redstone cleanup proves process

Company says method used to destroy deadly chemical can rid others

By JAY REEVES
The Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM — A small company is hoping to find new uses for technology proven in the destruction of a deadly chemical stockpile in North Alabama.

Integrated Environmental Services Inc. says methods it used to safely destroy more than 1,700 pounds of a highly volatile material at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville could be used to get rid of other deadly materials, including arsenic gas and uranium derivatives.

"This is kind of a pioneering venture that could have some payoffs down the road," said Jeffrey W. Gold, who worked on the disposal project.

The Atlanta-based company, which has only 10 employees, over the summer finished destroying the government's last known stockpile of pentaborane, a substance so deadly even one drop on the skin can kill.

The chemical, manufactured in 1961, was placed in an earthen bunker for storage after it was rejected as a possible rocket fuel.

The substance — known as the "green dragon" for the color of the flame produced when it ignites — remained in storage for at least 20 years until the Army hired Integrated Environmental Services to destroy it.

A 200,000-pound pentaborane stockpile was detonated last year in a remote section of Edwards Air Force Base in California. That couldn't be done at Redstone because of the base's proximity to Huntsville.

So the company, working under a $603,000 contract, developed a new system for destroying the chemical.

The storage containers were removed from the bunker and heated to transform liquid pentaborane into a vapor, which is less dangerous. The vapor was then mixed with water, mak it harmless.

"That was the beauty of whole thing. We did it with j plain water like comes out your tap," Gold said.

Gold said the only byprodu were hydrogen gas, which v vented into the atmosphere, a 40,000 gallons of water that c tained a small amount of bo acid. The water was proces at a treatment plant.

Adjustments to the dispo system meant the work t about two months longer t planned. "We had to change layout of the equipment change some of the systems. it pretty much went as planne Gold said.