

Plan to Burn Surplus Defoliant On Ship in Pacific Is Protested

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HONOLULU, April 26—Hawaiian and Micronesian environmentalists have joined here to protest an Air Force plan to burn 2.3 million gallons of herbicide orange about 120 miles west of Johnston Island in the Pacific Ocean.

The weed killer, which was used to defoliate the forests of Vietnam before it was discontinued and shipped to Johnston Island and Gulfport, Miss., for storage, would be incinerated aboard a specially equipped Dutch Vessel if the Environmental Protection Agency gives its approval.

At a day-long hearing yesterday at the State Capitol in Honolulu, the only testimony against the incineration proposal came from representatives of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and a Hawaiian environmental group, Life of the Land.

Demei Otobed, chief entomologist for the trust territory, was joined in protesting against the plan for disposing of the volatile chemicals by Tony Hodges, a spokesman for Life of the Land. Mr. Hodges got permission from J. Brian Molloy, the E.P.A.'s acting deputy assistant administrator for water enforcement, to testify.

Wants Hearing Moved

Mr. Hodges, who has argued frequently with Hawaiian officials, told the environmental agency and the Air Force that the hearing "should be held in Micronesia because those are the people who live downwind [of the proposed incineration]."

Referring to Air Force assertions that all but a fraction of the herbicide orange would be destroyed in the operation, Mr. Hodges said, "If it is going to be so safe, why are you

putting it out in the middle of the ocean?"

He said the trust territory residents "would be strongly opposed to the burning of herbicide orange upwind of them." He added, "The people who used it in Vietnam should take the risks—not those in Micronesia."

The trust territory's Mr. Otobed, who testified later in the public hearing, also deplored the Air Force's proposal. He read a resolution adopted by the trust territory's Environmental Protection Board that contended that the plan "may expose the islands and the people of the trust territory to dangerous health hazard and environmental contamination the extent of which cannot be determined."

Dr. Richard E. Marland, director of the Office of Environmental Quality Control for the state of Hawaii, also urged the Air Force to consider alternative disposal methods.

Kenneth E. Biglane, director of oil and special materials control for the E.P.A., told about 50 persons at the hearing that "if there are viable alternatives, feasible alternatives, then those should prevail."

Dr. B.E. Welch, special assistant for environmental quality for the office of the Secretary of the Air Force, defended the proposals and said after the hearing:

"We do not see that there will be any impact whatsoever on the trust territory. We have seen nothing that would indicate that at all."

The hearing was recessed until Monday, when it will be resumed in San Francisco.

Mr. Molloy said that it might take six months before the environmental agency reached a decision on whether to grant a permit to burn the surplus herbicide orange.