Environmental contractors sort through barrels of toxic chemicals at the abandoned Broussard Chemical site near Abbeville. EPA officials have estimated the cost of the cleanup to be around $400,000.

Chemical cleanup commences

EPA moves in on abandoned disposal sites

By Bruce Murray
Vermilion Bureau writer

ABBEVILLE — Cleanup operations for toxic chemicals that have spilled from dilapidated storage tanks and are stored in drums in an abandoned warehouse continued Tuesday at former Broussard Chemical sites on South Henry Street.

Contractors dressed in “moon suits” began sorting through some 300 barrels of toxic chemicals in the decaying warehouse at 713 South Henry — right next to the Vermilion River and just outside the city limits.

Next week, large liquid filtration equipment will be brought in across the street to treat the oil waste water in two clusters of large tanks, according to Robert Sullivan of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The EPA took control of the sites Monday and will proceed with the clean-up for the next four to six weeks, Sullivan said.

The nine tanks contain a total of 1.4 million gallons of waste liquid, he said.

Seven of the nine tanks contain water mixed with waste oil, while the two larger tanks hold water mixed with oil and glycol — the main component of anti-freeze.

The tanks, which originally contained oil, are vintage 1940s, according to Sullivan.

The area was apparently an oil distribution site, he said. The Texaco insignia still is visible on the tanks.

However, the corroding tanks now are leaking and are in potential danger of collapsing, Sullivan said. The tanks are surrounded by dead and blackened brush.

One of the glycol tanks has holes in its roof. Liquid obviously has spilled down the side and onto the ground.

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The barrels in the warehouse contain three major substances — solvents, corrosives, such as hydrochloric acid and caustic soda, and flammable petrochemicals.

The primary potential public health threat would be if someone ventured onto the property and got into the barrels, Sullivan said. Also, if the property were to catch fire, the combustible chemicals could explode, he said.

After the clean-up is completed, Sullivan said the EPA will attempt to collect from responsible parties. Although there have been many operators on the property, Sullivan said John Broussard, the former owner of Broussard Chemical, has been pinpointed as the primary responsible party.

Broussard Chemical went out of business in 1992 and Broussard declared bankruptcy.

Broussard also is facing administrative action from the state Department of Environmental Quality, according to DEQ attorney Chris Ratcliff.

Broussard, who now operates AntiFreeze Inc., just up the road from the clean-up sites, said he is willing to cooperate with clean-up efforts, but is unable to pay.

“I just do not have the money to clean it up,” he said.

The entire cost of the effort will be about $400,000, Sullivan said.