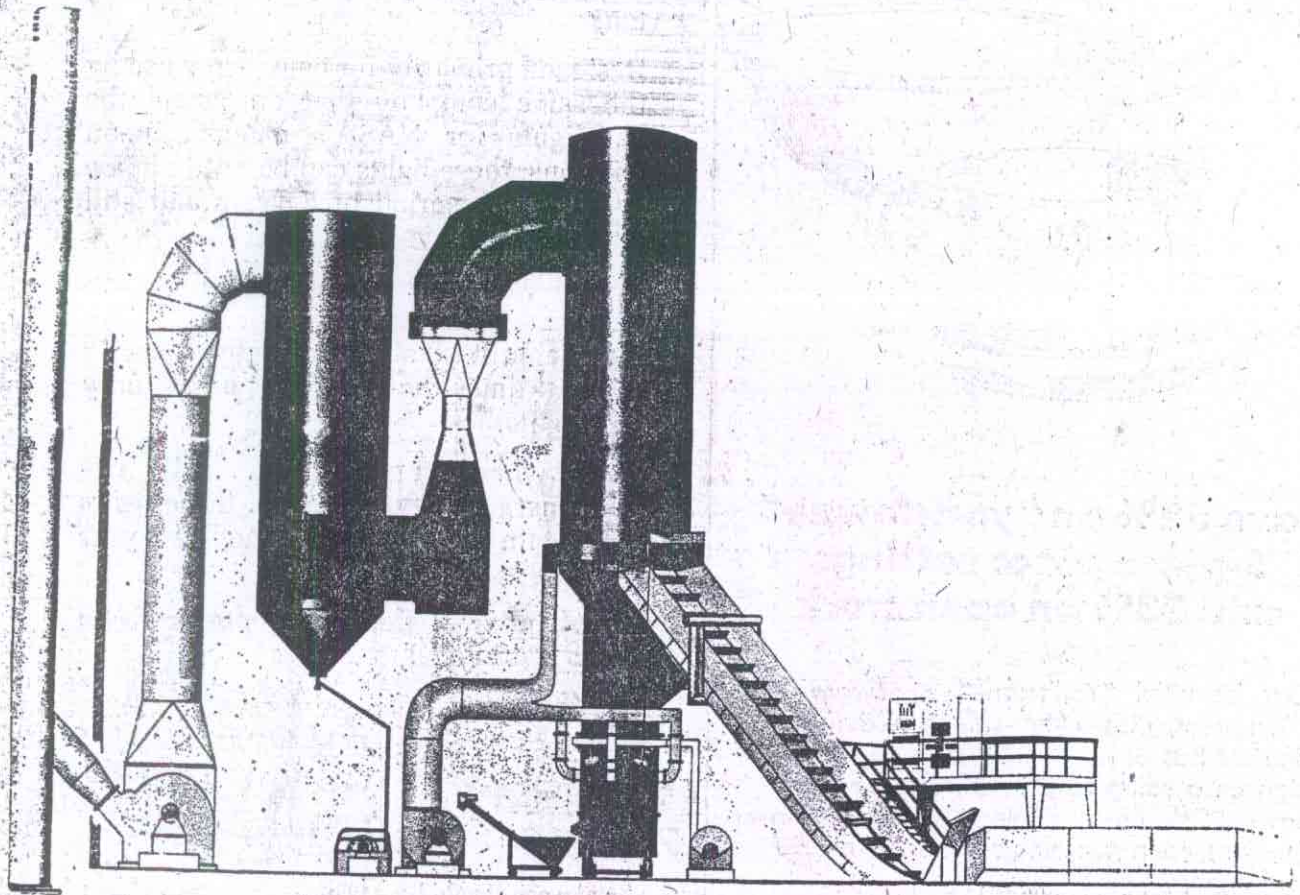


NSA Secrets-Swallower Chokes Up



Sketch of \$1.2 million "classified waste destructor" built at National Security Agency headquarters at Ft. Meade.

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By Douglas Watson
Washington Post Staff Writer

Two years ago the National Security Agency got what it hoped would be the ultimate disposal machine—a \$1.2 million "classified waste destructor" to swallow 20 tons of top secrets every day.

However, there is a prob-

lem. The destructor doesn't work and the top-secret trash keeps accumulating, NSA and Army Corps of Engineers spokesmen acknowledged yesterday.

The destructor — which some NSA employees call "White elephant No. 1"—was supposed to convert the classified trash into gases

and liquid that could be piped off.

However, an informed source said, on more than one occasion jackhammers were needed to break up the rock-like residue that accumulated in the destructor.

And officials at NSA, the nation's electronic interception and code-breaking

agency, were appalled to discover at least once that some uncooked classified communications were blowing unscathed out the destructor's stack despite temperatures as high as 3,400 degrees Fahrenheit.

NSA personnel were

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quickly detailed to police the grounds and recover the escaping bits of high-security papers, computer printouts, magnetic tapes and codebooks, an informed source said.

With its three-story disposal equipment inoperative, the NSA has been able to keep even with the constant accumulation of classified wastes only by storing 6,000 tons of it at Ft. Holabird on the edge of Baltimore, an informed source said.

He said 20-ton Army trucks, carrying armed guards, periodically are being used to haul other loads of the shredded but still high-security stuff from NSA headquarters at Ft. Meade, Md., to be destroyed at a paper mill near Baltimore.

Before canceling its contract for the destructor in December, the Corps of Engineers noted, "The equipment only operated a total of 51 days during the 17-month period after construction completion and each operating period ended in mechanical failure."

A separately built \$1.8 million pneumatic tube system that will suck the daily

accumulation of burn bags from NSA's mammoth headquarters complex to the shut-down destructor across the street is nearly operational, an NSA spokesman said.

However, he acknowledged that without the destructor, which was supposed to be able to digest six tons of high-security office debris in an hour, NSA has nothing that can destroy the material as fast as it will be arriving by the special vacuum system.

The destructor was heralded by its manufacturers, the Process Plants Corp. of College Point, N.Y., and its subsidiary, American Thermogen Inc. of Whitman, Mass., as providing a revolu-

tionary "total reduction process" that would eliminate solid wastes without requiring large-scale landfills or causing air pollution.

Instead, the destructor has caused headaches and embarrassment for all involved. The government, which has paid all but \$70,000 of the \$1.2 million purchase price, is now trying to get its money back and litigation is likely, Norman Block, a Process Plants Corp. director, said.

Block said the envisioned destruction process worked in a pilot model built in Massachusetts that was shown to some NSA officials. However, Block said,

as far as he knows the process has never been used regularly anywhere.

Dr. William T. Ingram, a former consulting engineer for the project, blamed the Corps of Engineers for allegedly failing to be certain that engineering specifications were completely followed during construction.

However, the Corps of Engineers reported that despite numerous adjustments by the manufacturer, "The destructor has never operated at its design capacity of six tons per hour nor has it operated continuously for an extended period of time."

An NSA spokesman said: "Our research will continue."