



# Louisiana Environmental Justice Voices

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Louisiana Environmental Justice Project

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## CHALMETTE NEEDS OFFICIAL AIR MONITORS

by Kenneth Ford

“You ever go in a bakery shop and smell the bread or doughnuts?” asks Johnny Lewis, a member of St. Bernard Citizens for Environmental Quality (SBCEQ). “And then you say to the baker, ‘Sure smells good in here!’ and the baker says that he does not smell anything.” This could be the same reason that the “Odor Patrol” from Chalmette Refinery says they don’t smell anything when they leave work, and yet the neighbors notice the obnoxious odors.

On Friday, January 7, the Chalmette Refinery had a spill of over 20,000 gallons of gasoline. The refinery stated that the spill was contained inside of the levee built around the tank area. The public was told about a “mist” that the spill produced that closed Paris Road for several hours. What is in a “mist” that comes from a spill of 20,000 gallons of fuel? Does it contain chemicals such as benzene, toluene and other toxic substances?

To properly protect the environment, we need monitors that run 24/7 and detect all toxic chemical releases. The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) says they will install a monitor which will run every sixth day. Do we only breath air every sixth day? Had this monitor been in place on that Friday, I wonder if it would have sampled the air or if it would have been off because it was not the proper day.

The Louisiana Bucket Brigade showed SBCEQ and other communities how to monitor their own air with the EPA-approved “bucket.” SBCEQ continues to test the air quality in St. Bernard with the “bucket,” finding that the chemicals in our air vary by day and sometimes by hour.

Here is what we found on these select days:

June 10, 2003: Carbonyl sulfide, toluene, and other chemicals.

June 22, 2003: Acetone, carbon disulfide, carbonyl sulfide, 2-butanone (MEK), toluene, m.p.-xylenes and other chemicals.

December 9, 2003: Hydrogen sulfide (H2S), toluene and other chemicals

December 23, 2003: Toluene, m.p.-xylenes and other chemicals.

February 23, 2004: Carbon disulfide, H2S, MEK, 4-methyl-2-pentanone, toluene, and other chemicals.

March 1, 2004: H2S, toluene and other chemicals

June 21, 2004: Acetone, carbon disulfide, H2S, toluene and other chemicals.

June 29, 2004: Carbon disulfide, H2S, toluene and other chemicals.

October 10, 2004 (8:15pm): H2S, toluene and other chemicals.

October 10, 2004 (10:15pm): Benzene, carbon disulfide, H2S, toluene and other chemicals.

October 17, 2004: Acetone, benzene, H2S, toluene and other chemicals.

October 26, 2004: Acetone, H2S, toluene and other chemicals.

October 28, 2004: Benzene, H2S, toluene and other chemicals.

Other samples have shown similar results.

Our conclusion: “Monitors don’t lie. We need them in the right places.”

### CHRONIC INHALATION EFFECTS \*

Benzene: known human carcinogen, can cause neurological and reproductive problems in humans.

Carbon disulfide: may effect the peripheral nervous system.

Carbonyl sulfide: not assessed under IRIS.

Hydrogen sulfide: can cause lesions in human nasal passages.

Methyl ethyl ketone (MEK, 2-butanone): can effect bone development

Methyl isobutyl ketone (MIBK, 2-methyl-4-pentanone): can cause reduced fetal weight, skeletal variations and increased fetal death in mice and skeletal variation in rats.

Toluene (methyl-benzene): a known respiratory irritant in humans, can cause neurological problems.

Xylenes (M-xylene, P-xylene): can impair motor coordination.

\*From the EPA’s Intergrated Risk Information System, these chemicals have the following effects under chronic inhalation exposure (<http://www.epa.gov/iris/>).

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## EJ NEWS

### STATE INDUSTRIES RELEASING LARGE AMOUNT OF CANCER-CAUSING CHEMICALS

Louisiana is topping all of the wrong lists again. The Pelican state ranks in the top three for amount of known cancer-causing chemicals released by industry, according to the Baton Rouge Advocate ("Study: La. in top three for cancer-causing releases" 1/11/05). Environmental Defense announced these statistics in a report that analyzed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) 2002 data.

Louisiana ranks second in the nation for amount of cancer-causing toxics released into the water, behind frontrunner South Carolina, and third for releases to the air, after SC and Texas. Six Louisiana industries rank in the top 100 for these toxic releases, according to the 2002 TRI data. Vulcan Materials Company Chemical Division in Geismar rates highest of La. industries on this list. Carol Andress, senior

## Upcoming Events

### Join the Sierra Club for Lunch!

As always you are welcome to join the Sierra Club– Baton Rouge for our monthly brown bag lunch. Due to Mardi Gras, the next lunch will be on **February 15th**. Please RSVP to [mara.cohen@sierraclub.org](mailto:mara.cohen@sierraclub.org) or 225-925-8650.

### REMINDER:

Get your story out! Submit your article by Wednesday, February 9th to be published in our next issue!

### SAVE THE DATE:

The 10th Annual Tulane Environmental Conference will be on April 1-2, 2005.

policy analyst with Environmental Defense, says the report's purpose is to educate the public about releases, but actually drawing the link between public health and pollution is very complex.

The six Louisiana industries listed in the report's top 100 for pounds of cancer-causing toxics released and reported in 2002 are Vulcan Material Co. Chemical Division in Geismar (15), Dupont Dow Elastomers LLC, Pontchartrain Site in LaPlace (17), Chalmette Refining LLC in Chalmette (61), PPG Industries Inc. in Lake Charles (81), Gaylord Container Corp. in Bogalusa (92), and ExxonMobil Refining and Supply in Baton Rouge (95).

### DEQ REVIEWING EFFECTS OF RULE CHANGE IN SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL

DEQ is looking for comments on how and where Exploration and Production (E & P) waste should be disposed of. They are accepting comments on the minimum standard requirements for the waste accepted at solid waste facilities. Comments should be sent by 4:30pm on April 20<sup>th</sup> to Sharon Parker, Box 4313, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-4313 or via fax 225-219-3582 or via email [sharon.parker@la.gov](mailto:sharon.parker@la.gov).

### WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

Researchers at *The Houston Chronicle* were curious about air toxics from the city's industries and its connection to the health of local community members. Check out the report: "*In Harm's Way*"

<http://www.chron.com/content/chronicle/special/04/toxic/index.html>