

OBSERVATEUR

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LAPLACE, LOUISIANA 25 CENTS



EPA OFFICIAL NORM THOMAS, standing, explains how an environmental impact statement is written. Thomas moderated a nearly six-hour-long "scoping" meeting Friday at the state district courthouse in Edgard. PHOTO BY JOE BYRNES

EPA's Thomas hears more on Formosa

By JOE BYRNES

EDGARD — In another long public meeting Friday night, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) heard citizens' comments and concerns about proposed Formosa Plastics Corp. rayon and pulp processing plants in Wallace on which the EPA is drafting an environmental impact statement (EIS) before issuing a permit.

The EIS, being conducted for the EPA by Walk Haydel of Metairie, addresses the environmental and total impact of the \$700 million complex. Friday's informal public meeting at the Edgard courthouse completed the first stage of a year-long process that will include a formal public hearing on the EIS document itself.

Most commenters stressed siting and environmental issues, though some residents and public officials favored Formosa because of possible economic benefits.

Norm Thomas of the EPA told the more than 100 participants that he had come "to hear the concerns

and issues you may have." He heard plenty.

SITING ISSUES

Lawyers for Matilda Stream, owner of Evergreen Plantation, objected to the location of the proposed complex very near the 19th century plantation. "(Stream's) main opposition to this is the Whitney (Plantation) site. The Willow Bend site is much more suitable," said attorney Suzanne Guidry.

(Formosa considered purchasing the Willow Bend property — 2,200 acres of Shell Oil Co. land about 3 miles downriver in St. John the Baptist Parish. Formosa decided not to buy the property because the cost would exceed \$10,000 per usable acre, Alden Andre, the Formosa official in charge of United States operations, stated during a deposition taken in connection with a suit challenging the recent rezoning of the Whitney site.)

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At the meeting, attorney James Coleman questioned why the Whitney site was selected during a helicopter trip with government officials.

"Was it because somebody wanted to save money? Was it because it was a cheaper area?" asked Coleman.

(Coleman was referring to a Jan. 23, 1990, helicopter trip in which Andre, St. John Parish President Lester J. Millet Jr., Don Hays with

the state Department of Economic Development, and Pointe Coupee police jury president Clement Guidry looked at various sites in Pointe Coupee and St. John parishes, according to Hays and state records.

(In the deposition, Andre told how the Whitney site was selected. He said he told Millet and Hays that "it appeared that St. John Parish was out" because of the cost of the Willow Bend land.

"It was Mr. Lester Millet who asked me had I considered Whitney Plantation," Millet advised me that he had spoken to some property owners who owned property adjacent to Whitney Plantation and that they would be willing to sell their property," said Andre.

"The three of us flew over the site," explained Andre, "so he could show me the concept he had in mind and I could see that it would work. So thus we began the process of trying to buy the property."

Coleman said at the meeting, "It doesn't take a wise man to know (that), once the Formosa plant is built, Evergreen can no longer be used as a residence — can no longer be the wonderful site it is."

James Logan, of the Louisiana Landmark Society, and others expressed concern for preserving the area's "historical treasures."

"Evergreen, Whitney, and now Oak Alley are in the area of pollution effects," said Logan. He suggested that the land along the Mississippi River from Oak Alley Plantation in Vacherie and Evergreen Plantation is "a district that has historic value in itself."

Classification of the area as a historical district would complicate developers' plans.

Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) official Vicki Arroyo spoke at the meeting. She said that the DEQ would look at the siting of the plants. "(The DEQ) is very interested in determining why this exact site was chosen," said Arroyo.

A 1984 State Supreme Court ruling requires the DEQ to look carefully at siting alternatives before issuing a permit. Arroyo

said that, while DEQ Secretary Paul Templett "is committed to enforcing the court ruling," opponents of the Wallace site should not "hang their hats on when DEQ is going to get involved in the process." Late in the permitting process, such decisions have "inertia," she said.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Business and government representatives spoke in support of the Formosa complex.

Clyde Todd, a representative of the Louisiana Forestry Association, said that it "brings a very important market" for Louisiana lumber.

St. James Parish school board member Henry Brock brought a resolution approved by that government body supporting the proposed Formosa facilities.

"You only grow by bringing in industry," said Brock.

State District Judge Joel Chaisson likewise stressed the economic importance of the proposed complex.

Chaisson said his father earned his living at a chemical plant. The judge then recounted a scene from his childhood.

In it his father had just come home from work and was taking off his jacket.

"Wow! That sure stinks!" exclaimed the boy.

His father replied, "Son, that smells like beans and rice to me."

Chaisson described the importance of jobs from his perspective as a judge. "Nothing breeds criminality...more than not having a job," he said.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Meeting participants identified possible environmental problems

ranging from odor to dioxin emissions.

Luke Fontana, an attorney for the citizens' group Save Our Wetlands, accused the EPA of not acting in good faith because its EIS did not address possible future construction of a petrochemical plant on the Wallace site. (Formosa has indicated that it is considering building a large petrochemical plant there.)

"We will address the project that is proposed by Formosa," said Thomas. He added that if, later, the expansion was proposed, he "would recommend that there be an EIS written on it."

Participants expressed concern about chemical plants' self-monitoring of emissions. "Plants monitor themselves — there's nobody looking out for us," said one resident.

Zeb Mayhew, manager of Oak Alley Plantation, identified odor as a problem. "I feel in my gut that we're not getting the full story about what it's going to be like to live around this plant," he said.

"I certainly don't want to wake up in the morning and have the air around Oak Alley smell (like the air around Pascagoula, Miss.)," said Mayhew.

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door-to-door."

He rejected the idea that parents were afraid to confront the problem in public. "It's not the parents that are scared, it's the people who are running the programs that are scared," said Dedrick Johnson. "If they won't come to us, go to them."

Walter (Gus) Madere, child welfare and attendance supervisor for the St. John Parish school system, emphasized parental responsibility for at-risk children with discipline problems. He said the schools will ask judges "just to hold the parents responsible."

State district Judge Tom Daley said alternatives are needed for troubled youth. "When we see the individual, often they've failed in the school system — they're on the street," he said. "Unless we can force them back into some alternative, they are going to be criminals for at least the next 10 years of their lives."

A vocational or other educational program, in which at-risk youth "can gain some self-esteem," is essential, Daley said.

DFSC chairperson Amy Miller suggested that a community recreation center might provide alternatives for some youths.

"Maybe we need to start pressuring the parish council and par-

ish officials to set up a community center," Miller said. It "would be a huge deterrent" because it would give children a place to go, she said.

Among other issues discussed by forum participants was a new wine cooler that may pose a special risk to children. Cisco wine cooler has an alcohol content of up to 24 percent, according to drug-free schools coordinator Elton Oubre Jr.

Oubre encouraged people to look on the shelves of local groceries to see if Cisco is stocked there.

"If it is there," said Miller, "you might want to tell the manager you don't think it should be there — it is very dangerous for kids."

"If enough people express that opinion, maybe they'll get rid of it or put it some place where kids can't get to it," she said.

Miller said she was pleased that representatives from many areas of the community came to the meeting.

Members of the community must take responsibility for the drug problem, she said. The solution "is for the citizens to stand up and say we, not they, are going to address (this)," Miller said.

"What we have here tonight is a start," she said. "Please don't let it stop here."

ST. JOHN POLICE

LaPLACE — The following arrest information was released by the St. John the Baptist Parish sheriff's office since Feb. 9.

— Rodney Dawson, 20, 123 Dove St., LaPlace, was booked with possession of rock cocaine and resisting arrest by flight.

— Jamie Miano, 31, 8794 Sunnyside Drive, LaPlace, was booked with having no license plate, driving under suspension and contempt of court.

— Mauldon Jones Jr., 24, Route 1, Box 709T, Reserve, was booked with contempt of court.

— Annie D. James, 36, Route 1, Box 768D, Reserve, was booked with theft by shoplifting from That Stanley grocery store.

— Carlos Pinerio, 17, Belle Terre Drive, LaPlace, was booked with theft by shoplifting from the Delchamps grocery store in LaPlace.

— Todd Simon, 17, P.O. Box

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