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March 22, 1994

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SHRIMPERS' FLOTILLA TO PROTEST FORMOSA PLASTICS PLANT
Fight for ecosystem escalates with March 26 protest

POINT COMFORT, Texas -- Shrimpers' on-going protests against the Formosa Plastics PVC plant expansion will escalate on March 26, when the shrimpers will protest with a boat flotilla on the Matagorda Ship Channel in Lavaca Bay.

The flotilla will begin with a press conference at 11:00 a.m. Saturday, when an estimated 50 boats will gather near the Lavaca Bay boat launch at Highway 35 in Port Lavaca. (Shuttle boats for media will be available.)

The flotilla -- the latest in a series of demonstrations by Calhoun County residents -- is in protest of the \$1.3 billion expansion of the Formosa plant at Point Comfort, and its devastating effects on the local shrimping industry. The Formosa expansion will result in up to 15 million gallons a day of contaminated wastewater discharged into upper Lavaca Bay, one of the last remaining unpolluted shrimp and oyster breeding grounds on the central Texas Gulf Coast.

Due to the volume of Formosa's discharge, the Texas Department of Health closed upper Lavaca Bay to all oyster production because of the Department's inability to ensure the safety of the bay seafood. The bay is an important estuary, bringing in revenue that the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department estimates to be approximately \$140 million annually. This loss is a critical blow to the already struggling bay shrimpers along the Texas Coast.

The shrimpers say that in addition to the Formosa threat, they face yet another attack on the industry from regulations proposed by Texas Parks and Wildlife. In addition to the bay closures associated with the Formosa and Alcoa discharges, the proposed regulations, they say, could restrict commercial shrimping to the point of putting them out of business.

"Our families have been on these bays for generations, but this is the moment of truth for bay shrimping," said Diane Wilson, a fourth-generation shrimper who has battled Formosa for years. "The government allows corporations to poison our stock, then puts us under regulations that make it impossible to shrimp. We have nothing left to lose. We have to fight."

Residents and commercial shrimpers from the area have continually protested against the Formosa PVC expansion, taking their message that the Formosa expansion is too dangerous and will destroy the area ecosystem and the local shrimping industry to Gov. Richards and state and federal agencies. Opposition to the plant, based on economic, environmental, public health and worker safety issues, have been ignored by all the relevant agencies.

The shrimpers are calling on the EPA and state agencies to provide alternatives which will remove Formosa's toxic discharge from the bay. The shrimpers are concerned about harmful effects from Formosa's discharge on the Alcoa underwater mercury Superfund site. Two other agencies have detailed their concerns to the EPA about the destructive synergistic effects of the copper in Formosa's discharge with the mercury. The shrimpers also point to the fact that Formosa's wastewater permit is not in effect, and are doubtful Formosa will be able to meet the levels the permit mandates once it goes into effect.

Questions surrounding the safety of the Formosa PVC expansion grew last month, with the Clinton Administration's call for a national strategy to "substitute, reduce, or prohibit the use of chlorine and chlorinated compounds." Such compounds are used and discharged in making PVC plastic. The administration cited growing evidence that links organochlorine contamination "not only to cancer but also to neurological, reproductive, developmental, and immunological adverse effects."

European data indicates that huge quantities of dioxin, the most toxic organochlorine, and related compounds are produced in the manufacture of feedstocks for PVC. The EPA has not pursued similar testing of Formosa's existing PVC feedstock plant, or any other U.S. PVC facility. Alternatives are available now and in use in many other nations for all major uses of chlorine, including PVC. PVC can be replaced with traditional materials or chlorine-free plastics when necessary.

The EPA has been unwilling and unable to reconcile the developing chlorine policies with the agency's own fast-tracking of Formosa's expansion. Many other agencies protested the EPA's handling of Formosa's permits in the final Record of Decision on the expansion.

Formosa has a long record of environmental destruction, including many violations of state and federal environmental and worker health and safety laws, with penalties totaling over \$5 million. Formosa recently announced the expansion of an additional three thousand acres along the Texas Coast. The company owns over 25,000 acres of undeveloped land along the Texas Coast.

The shrimpers are supported by several environmental groups, including: Greenpeace, Clean Water Action, Louisiana Environmental Action Network, the Council on International and Public Affairs, and Communities Concerned About Corporations, a coalition of 102 groups.