

DEAF
DOME

Sports:
LSU upsets fifth-ranked
Arizona to the delight
of a sold out Assembly
Center crowd.
See page 9

Covering the LSU community for more than 100 years.

The Reveille

http://reveille.stumedia.lsu.edu/

TUESDAY

February 1, 2000

58 High 40 Low

Partly cloudy with
lows in the lower
40s.

INDEX

News Briefs
Campus Life
Viewpoints
Sports
Classifieds

Citizens testify against chemistry plants

BY MARLENE NAANES
STAFF WRITER

Louisiana community activists testified at a public hearing Friday, tearfully recounting how the chemical dioxin has contributed to health problems affecting their families and friends.

Sponsors of the hearing, including Louisiana student and community environmental groups, invited citizens to present their stories about how the chemical affected their communities to a listening panel, which included representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Louisiana Trial Lawyers Association.

"Through the years, I know dioxin has affected me, and that is going to be with me for the rest of my life," said Walker Wright, North Baton Rouge Environmental Association member and resident of Alsen. "It is the most toxic substance that man ever created and its slowly building up in our bodies."

Walker and other speakers testified about illnesses in their communities they said dioxin caused. Walker attributed his daughter's and son's learning disabilities to exposure to the chemical, and said his thought processes "are not what they are supposed to be."

Walker's health problems, which include peeling skin, began in 1986 when industries started releasing dioxin into the environment.

Florence Robinson, Louisiana Environmental Action Network board member who was also an Alsen resident, said a toxic waste site in Alsen released dioxin at times when the site would spontaneously catch fire.

"I know that I personally suffered severe memory loss, uncontrollable ticks, slurred speech, difficulty with long term memory, immune system suppression, and I have been hospitalized many times in the last 10 years," Robinson said.

Her son's temperament changed from energetic to lethargic when she and her family moved to Alsen in

See HEARING, page 8



BRAD BLACKWELL/The Reveille

BUCKETS OF AIR: Denny Larson, coordinator of the Bucket Brigade, shows a special bucket that will sample the air in order to detect any pollutant chemicals present. Larson presented this device at the Environmental Panel discussion held Jan. 28 in the Radisson Hotel.

HEARING

From page 1

1971 and were exposed to the chemical, which affects children's nervous systems most devastatingly, Robinson said.

When her family moved away from Alsen, her son's symptoms went away.

Shirley Johnson, Mossville Environmental Action Now Inc. member, testified that after laboratory tests, 28 Mossville citizens contained two to three times the level of dioxin allowable in the human body.

Johnson said she became severely ill during The Bucket Brigade, a program where Mossville citizens tested their community for pollution levels.

"The community of Mossville's dioxin-related cancers are higher than any place else with the same population," Johnson said.

Plaquemine also has a high rate of cancer—a rate Liz Avants, director of Alliance Against Waste and Action to Restore the Earth, attributed to emissions from polyvinyl chloride plants in and around her community.

Avants testified that many of her family members, neighbors and friends sustained illnesses from exposure to dioxin at and around PVC plants. She also said she lost her husband to heart failure in 1998, and she attributes his death to dioxin.

The head of the Plaquemine-area Cancer Society showed Avants a list of cancer victims who asked for assistance in her area. The list, which contained 350 victims in her 32,000-person community, did not include afflicted people who did not ask for assistance, Avants said.

One speaker told the panel and audience about train cars filled with toxic chemicals that spilled in her community of North Lake Charles.

"We are like a chemical plant ourselves," said Lois Malvo, president of Fisherville Environmental Action Now. "[Officials] keep telling us our land is worth nothing, but it must be worth something to the chemical industries because they show up and park the cars every night."

Other activists at the hearing pleaded with the EPA to take action in their communities.

Beth Zilbert, an activist from Lake Charles, said an air sample from a Lake Charles family's front porch was 100 times above clean air standards.

Zilbert said she asked the EPA to stop giving permits allowing industries to discharge pollutants in her community because of its poor air quality. She also asked the EPA to let organizations outside of polluting companies clean up their waste sites.

"Do you allow bank robbers to go back to the vault and fix the locks they broke?" Zilbert said.

Denny Larson, Bucket Brigade Coordinator, said his community group takes air samples in an effort to hold companies accountable for their pollution. Every time Bucket Brigade took a sample, companies were out of compliance, he said.

David Brown, president of the Student Environmental Action Coalition at LSU, said students at LSU are also working against problems caused by dioxin.

"If they are not doing it, no one

else will," Brown said.

The hearing also commemorated The American People's Dioxin Report released last month by the Center for Health, Environment and Justice.

The report, compiled by scientists from universities and laboratories around the country, also revealed sources and health effects caused by dioxin, Robinson said.

Scientists who contributed to the report concluded that some sources of dioxin are paper and pulp mills, incinerators and PVC plants.

Dioxin can be introduced to the human body through plant emissions, food consumption, breast feeding and in-utero.

The report links the chemical which builds up in the body over time, to behavioral problems, IQ deficits, a suppressed immune system, reproductive and developmental problems and cancer.

Warren Arthur, EPA representative, pledged to the panel and audience that he would write a report about the speakers' testimonies and the CHEJ report.

Arthur as well as Louisiana and U.S. senators and representatives were invited to sit on the hearing's listening panel; however, Arthur was the only invited panel member in attendance.

Those not present said their out-of-town flights were canceled, Robinson said.

"Many top scientists reached sane, logical conclusions to tell the American public the facts that are so often poo-pooed away," Robinson said.