



June 11, 2004

Organization gives citizens power to test the air they breathe

In the past, when Louisiana citizens who lived near an oil refinery sniffed something noxious in the air, they had to take the plant's or the government's word as to whether they were being exposed to a toxic substance.

Now, with the help of new technologies, the nonprofit Louisiana Bucket Brigade is working to put the ability to monitor the air in the hands of community members.

The "bucket" of the organization's name is a simple device that allows regular people to take a three-minute air sample into a plastic bag. That bag is sent off to a lab for analysis. If it indicates certain substances are above the legal limit, citizens have evidence to back up any complaints.

"The government and industries communicate well together but people are often left out of the equation," said Anne Rolfes, executive director. "There is a vacuum of information

about what communities are breathing."

Rolfes started working with the buckets in 1999, and when communities responded favorably, she incorporated the Louisiana Bucket Brigade in 2000. The nonprofit is dependent upon grants from foundations and donations from individuals for funding. In the last year, it raised about \$200,000.

Based in New Orleans, the Louisiana Bucket Brigade helps gather air samples from many communities around the state, but tends to focus its energies in one place at a time. Currently, the Louisiana Bucket Brigade has been working in Chalmette. Its strategy is to go into "fenceline" neighborhoods several times a week and partner with existing community environmental organizations.

Name: Louisiana Bucket Brigade

Location: New Orleans

Director: Anne Rolfes

Service: Help communities do their own environmental testing via buckets that collect samples.

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Frank Dery, left, and Kenneth Ford use buckets from the Louisiana Bucket Brigade to monitor air quality in their Chalmette neighborhood.

— Henry K. Alpert