



**DOROTHY JENKINS** (left) of New Sarpy presented Orion Refining Corp. with air samples taken on Aug. 30 using a bucket distributed by the Louisiana Bucket Brigade. Remedial Operation Group (REG) Technical Director Ron Jansen (above) demonstrates how to use a summa canister air sampler to Orion workers. Orion brought in ROG to train its staff to take air samples in the community surrounding the plant.

Staff photos by Nicole LaPorte

# New Sarpy air brigade

*Citizens, industry take closer look at air around them*

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In response to air samples containing a high benzene content collected by New Sarpy residents on Aug. 30 and presented to Orion Refining Corp. officials last week, Orion has agreed to take additional air samples over the next few

weeks.

On Thursday, a representative from the Remedial Operation Group, a chemical testing company based in Crosby, Texas, visited Orion to train a group of the refinery's environmental engineers and industrial hygienists in how to use EPA-approved air sampling instruments known as summa canisters. A summa canister tests air quality over a 24-hour period.

ROG Technical Director Ron Jansen called the summa canisters "very versatile" and said they were

capable of "testing a wide range of compounds."

Orion called on ROG to train its staff because although Orion has air monitors located on various stacks, it does not have the appropriate equipment to sample air in the community.

Over the next few weeks, Orion will take three sets of air samples in various locations in and around its property. Each set will include 6 tests.

The location of two tests will be

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# Brigade

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selected by New Sarpy residents. The others will be determined by Orion.

The results of the tests, which take about two weeks to process, will be presented at the next Orion community meeting on Oct. 26.

Orion is also encouraging residents to phone in any suspicious odors so they can be examined by members of a 24-hour Orion staff.

The level of benzene detected by residents in samples taken near their homes along Orion's fence line was 14 parts per billion.

The state air standard for benzene, a carcinogen, is 3.78 parts per billion, according to Dept. of Environmental Quality Air Toxic Laboratory Manager Jim Hazlett. The standard is based on an average taken over a year's time.

According to DEQ Engineering Manager for Petroleum Chemicals and Refinery Permits Hilry Lantz, Louisiana is one of only states that has established its own toxic standards. "Most states are using the EPA's standards. We're one of the few that has our own," Lantz said.

chemical laboratory in New Iberia and has been reviewing air samples taken in New Sarpy and Norco, says that buckets are comparable to other more sophisticated air samplers.

"We're finding that the chemicals that citizens are finding taken with buckets compare with what's being released by industrial facilities," Soubra said. "A lot of the samples were taken during a period of time when chemicals have been released. There is a cause and effect."

As for buckets, Soubra said, "This is the only method for citizens to test the air they're breathing."

Anne Rolfes, director of the Louisiana Bucket Brigade, called buckets "a low-cost way for ordi-

Director Robert Gross, and Communities for a Better Environment Director Denny Larson, determined where and how the air samples would be conducted.

All parties said the tone of the conversation was congenial, and Orion agreed to Larson's proposal to conduct "snapshot" air samples along with the summa canister method.

"It's important to do both because you may not see specific upsets or leaks in a unit with a 24-hour sampling. We tried to impress that on them [Orion] and they agreed that it was important," Larson said.

Larson has provided ongoing technical assistance and funding to the Concerned Citizens groups of

Norco and New Sarpy for the past 5 years. He and Soubra will be reviewing Orion's air testing plan over the next few days. At this point, Larson says the Orion plan seems to be a "good, positive approach."

More of a concern, Larson said, is that DEQ does not directly monitor chemical facilities such as Orion.

"DEQ needs to set up monitors at industrial facilities the way they do in California. They need

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our own," Lantz said.

State standards must be at least as strict as Environmental Protection Agency standards, Lantz said.

Dorothy Jenkins of St. Charles Street in New Sarpy is one resident who presented an air sampling to Orion. Jenkins used a device known as a "bucket" to collect air that she then sent to a lab for testing.

Buckets are distributed by the Louisiana Bucket Brigade, a group dedicated to involving citizens in monitoring air quality.

The state DEQ, however, questions the accuracy of a bucket reading.

According to DEQ Communications Director Jeff Simon, "A bucket simply takes a snapshot in time, and we feel that scientifically you can not draw a conclusion from such a miniscule sampling. The sampling that we do is an 8-hour average and we feel that this is much more telling about what is actually in the air and what it is we are breathing.

"At any given time there will be certain chemicals or substances in the air that may not be representative of the air over time," Simon continued. "So in terms of validity we raise a real red flag to drawing any conclusion from that [a bucket reading]."

Wilma Soubra, who owns a

## *cause and effect."*

nary people to take air samples."

The EPA-approved plastic buckets, which are fitted with industrial parts, cost \$5 each.

Air-sampling buckets were developed in the mid-90s by Communities for a Better Environment, an environmental agency based in San Francisco. Now they are distributed throughout the country by various state organizations.

"I'm not saying buckets provide definitive testing," Rolfes said. "What they can do is say, 'Hello, this needs to be looked at more thoroughly.'"

Rolfes complained about the lack of involvement by the DEQ in the New Sarpy incident. "Whenever we send them something they always just pull it apart, yet they can never show us their data."

Yet she commended Orion's responsiveness and willingness to work with the community. "We're all trying to get to the same goal," she said. "They [Orion] have been very friendly and open about finding out what's coming from the plants and the refinery."

On Thursday morning a conference call between Rolfes, Jenkins, Soubra, Orion Health, Environmental and Safety

an air monitor station located fairly nearby that picks up aggregate emissions.

"The state of Louisiana air monitoring system is really a joke. The air stations are located so far away."

Larson said he has contacted the Environmental Protection Agency about the bucket samples taken in New Sarpy, but that he has received no definite response.

"We certainly want to know what the problems are," said EPA Region VI Air Enforcement Officer Tony Robledo.

"I asked him [Larson] to please share the information with us and the state so we can know what's getting picked up out there."

When Orion takes its samples, Jenkins says she plans on participating.

"I would like to have my bucket right beside them. They're going to have their bucket and I'm going to have mine," she said.

"We don't have any problem with the neighborhood being involved," said Orion CEO Clark Johnson.

"Ironically, we've been trying to do our own research. We feel we owe it to the community if they have a concern, even if there may be a lot of dispute over validity. This is not black and white by any means."