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Calif. lawmaker joins Norco group's crusade

Waters wants Shell to expand buyout

By Littice Bacon-Blood
River Parishes bureau

The Concerned Citizens of Norco has enlisted the help of U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters of California in its effort to have Shell Chemical Co. buy out the four streets that make up the Diamond community in Norco.

In a program designed to move some residents away from the plant's fence lines, Shell has offered to buy out residents on two streets, an offer that has

upset residents who say all four streets should be part of the deal.

Waters, a Democrat, sits on the House Judiciary Committee and has a national reputation as an advocate for environmental justice causes. She visited Norco last summer as part of an environmental tour sponsored by Greenpeace. Since her visit, she has supported the residents' quest and has written letters to Shell officials urging them to consider buying out all residents in the Diamond community.

"I visited. I walked through the community, and I understand the issue very well," Waters said.

In a letter to Shell dated Nov. 1, Wa-

METRO

Shell stands by Norco buyout proposal

WATERS, from B-1

ters writes: "Shell's buy-out plan of only two streets in the Diamond community disregards the life-and-death issues for residents of that community."

Shell officials have said that buying all four streets would have too large an impact on Norco. Shell Norco spokeswoman Lily Galland wouldn't comment on Waters' letter but emphasized that Shell's program is voluntary and is not a relocation.

"We think it's a good program," Galland said of the buyout that Shell and Motiva Norco Refining announced a year ago.

Shell wants to use the property as a landscaped buffer zone between homes and the plants.

Waters said she spoke to Shell officials in June and was told that they would reconsider their buyout stance.

Waters said she felt optimistic until she received a letter from Shell CEO Steven Miller in September indicating that the company has opted to stand by its original offer, she said.

"I was a bit surprised at his change in attitude," Waters said.

In the Nov. 1 letter to Miller, Waters offered to meet with company officials to discuss the buyout.

Waters says her involvement

in the issue depends on what the group wants.

"I plan my strategy in conjunction with the group," she said. "We talk through it and we develop a strategy. I am willing to do whatever's necessary to address this issue."

Galland said she didn't know

whether officials have agreed to meet with Waters.

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Reporter Mary Swerczek contributed this report.

Littice Bacon-Blood can be reached at con-blood@timespicayune.com or 652-0951.