Shell under fire

Shell land purchase draws heat

ERIC LE BLANC
Staff writer

On Wednesday, the Concerned Citizens of Norco and the Louisiana Bucket Brigade staged a protest in the Norco community known as Diamond, bearing signs that read "Shame on Shell" and "We Shell Overcome." Residents there are very upset about a stretch of land that Shell Chemical has purchased called the Gaspard Line.

"The Gaspard Line is supposed to be a buffer zone," said resident Larry Brown, who has lived in the community all of his life.

The property is located between East and Mary Streets and extends from River Road to the first railroad track.

Shell Public Information Officer Lilly Galland said that the purchase of the Gaspard Line was a condition of the purchase of desired land on the Mississippi River bateau. The same owner that the bateau was purchased from owns the Gaspard Line and made that a condition of the sale. The total amount of the sale was $158,000.

Some residents fear that their neighborhood is being enveloped by Shell. "These people feel trapped and now they are being completely encircled by this chemical giant," said Anne Rolfe, director of the Louisiana Bucket Brigade.

What angers some residents even more is that Shell is buying unoccupied property, but is not buying their residential property. "You mean to tell me that grass and trees come before human beings? That hurts me," said Gaynell Johnson, a Diamond resident.

The president of the Concerned Citizens of Norco, Margie Richard, stated, "Fifty years ago, Shell moved in and said they only wanted a tiny piece of property. Then they expanded all the way to my front door." Galland said that there should be no reason for the residents to feel surrounded because, "Shell will not develop that land commercially, but rather let the residents decide what should be done with it. We will clear the land of trash and debris and then let Diamond decide what should be done, whether that be a park or a walking trail or something else."

But that did not satisfy Brown, who said, "Who wants to take their children to a park that's filled with fumes and chemicals." Rolfe also remarked, "They say..."
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that it will be a park, but who
knows. It could very well turn into
pipeline in a few months." Also,
residents Janie Campbell spoke out
saying, "If they cut all these trees
down to make a park, there's
going to be more fumes and toxins
coming into our neighborhood."

Shell also believes that Norco
has seen the Gaspard Line as a
racial barrier that they, "...see as an
opportunity to break down and
remove the division in the com-
community," said Galland.

Shell and the Motiva Refinery
both have programs to buy the
fenceline residential property on
Cathy and Washington Streets, but
Diamond residents want the com-
panies to extend that to the rest of
the community. "You're going to
move them out and leave half of
their families here with all of these
toxins. That's an injustice," said
Campbell.

Shell has no plans to buy any
other residential property other
than fenceline property, said
Galland. "Our intention has never
been to buy out the
town of Norco."

Galland also pointed out that Shell has plans
to, "reduce emissions by 30 percent in the
next three years and to reduce flaring by 50
percent." She went on to say, "Shell is ded-
cated to continue to promote community
development through the Norco Community
Fund and other avenues."

The purchase took
many Diamond resi-
dents by surprise. "We
knew nothing about the
purchase until it hap-
pened to be mentioned
at a meeting that
Gaynell and I attended.
Otherwise, we still
wouldn't know about it," said East Street res-
ident Loretta Jenkins. Galland
responded that, "Shell never dis-
cusses land transactions with any-
one but the landowners."
Nevertheless, feelings of anger,
confusion and fear run through
many of Diamond's residents.

"We're just test subjects to them,
and they need to stop treating us
like a herd of sheep," said Brown
just before he stormed off down
the street.

Galland disagrees, stating,"Shell has been here for 75 years
and the only way we can succeed
is if the community succeeds. That
is our message to the citizens of
Norco."

Eric LeBlanc can be reached at
EricL@heraldguide.com or at
758-2795, ext. 219.