

Refinery is urged to add air monitor

Two groups go online with their systems

By Steve Cannizaro

St. Bernard/Plaquemines bureau

With a Internet-accessible air monitoring system leased by two environmental groups going online Thursday, several St. Bernard Parish officials encouraged Chalmette Refining LLC to buy similar \$60,000 devices so the public can have more information about the air quality.

"I think it would be in their own best interest to do that," St. Bernard Parish President Henry "Junior" Rodriguez said at ceremonies marking the startup of an air monitor that can detect six types of carcinogens and toxins and make the information available online for public viewing.

State Rep. Ken Odinet, D-Arabi, and Parish Council Chairman Joseph DiFatta also said they support asking the refinery to buy at least one of the air monitoring devices and make the information available to the public.

Odinet filed a bill last week seeking to require companies

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Refinery official says firm has no plans for monitor

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found by a court to have violated the federal Clean Air Act in St. Bernard Parish to install four new air monitors. The bill would create the St. Bernard Air Advisory Committee, made up of state and local officials and residents, with the power to determine where the monitors would be placed and the type and amount of chemicals the machines would sample. "I'd like them (Chalmette Refining officials) to get on board" and support the bill, Odinet said.

However, Nora Scheller, spokeswoman for Chalmette Refining, said, "Right now we have no plans" to purchase a monitor to put information online.

She emphasized that Chalmette Refining and the Murphy Oil USA refinery in Meraux jointly operate an air monitoring station near Chalmette Medical Center, although it doesn't make information avail-

able on online.

She said Chalmette Refining also welcomed an air monitoring station that the state Department of Environmental Quality installed near the refinery last week, which also lacks online capabilities.

"We believe it will alleviate community concerns" about air problems, she said, adding that the company believes "it's the responsibility of DEQ to monitor air quality in the parish."

Two environmental groups, St. Bernard Citizens for Environmental Quality and the Louisiana Bucket Brigade, held a ceremony Thursday as they began operating their online monitor that will check 24 hours a day for the presence of benzene, toluene, xylene, carbon disulfide, hydrogen sulfide and sulfur dioxide.

The address of the Web site is www.airmonitorchalmette.com.

The \$60,000 equipment will be near C.F. Rowley Elementary School in Chalmette, just down

the street from the Chalmette Refining plant.

"This is a long time coming," said Ken Ford, head of St. Bernard Citizens for Environmental Quality. Ford lives on Carroll Drive, within blocks of Chalmette Refining, which is on West St. Bernard Highway.

The environmental groups have been heavily critical of the oil refinery in the past two years, saying there have been too many emissions affecting air quality in St. Bernard Parish. The two groups are suing the refinery in federal court over alleged violations of the federal Clean Air Act.

But officials at Chalmette Refining and a consultant have said the two environmental groups are putting out "misinformation" about air quality and falsely suggesting it's harmful to health.

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