

The Times-Picayune

Wednesday, Sept. 24, 2003

Refinery emissions too high, groups say

Chalmette residents fear for their health

By Steve Cannizaro

St. Bernard/Plaquemines bureau

Ken Ford, 66, and Frank Deerey, 78, have been neighbors on Carroll Drive in Chalmette since the 1960s, and both have had cancer.

They don't blame their medical problems on the Chalmette Refining LLC plant one-half mile from their homes, but they do believe it has experienced too many accidental emissions of chemicals that could affect people's health.

Ford, who founded two environmental activist organiza-

tions, St. Bernard Citizens for Environmental Quality and the Louisiana Bucket Brigade, released a report on behalf of both groups Tuesday alleging the Chalmette refinery had "an alarmingly high rate" of emissions in May, June and July.

The report said that on 32 occasions during the period — roughly once every three days — the plant's emissions exceeded permitted levels. Ford's organizations said plant emissions went above permitted levels 10 times in May, six times in June and 16 times in July.

Total chemical emissions, they said, were more than 300,000 pounds, including more than 200,000 during a single incident July 11 in which sulfur dioxide

See **ENVIRONMENT**, B-2

Plant says it's careful in charting emissions

ENVIRONMENT, from B-1

and other chemicals were released after lightning struck the plant.

"We are concerned for our health," Ford said.

Ford and Anne Rolfes, director of the Bucket Brigade, which has also been active in charting plant emissions in St. Charles Parish, said they want state and federal environmental agencies to investigate the releases.

"We need industry and jobs in this parish," said Ford, who has been involved in several lawsuits against Chalmette Refining or against the Mobil Refinery, the name by which the plant was known for several years. "But I would say they are not good neighbors."

However, refinery spokeswoman Kimberly Brasington said the refinery strives to operate in compliance with all federal and state regulations and in an environmentally responsible manner.

"We do everything we can to minimize emissions" she said, adding that the refinery launches internal investigations when incidents take place.

The plant "immediately notifies the appropriate government agencies if refinery emissions exceed strict standards applying to the refinery," Brasington said.

These notifications are followed up with written reports that explain what happened, she said. "We take a conservative viewpoint in the reporting, and as a result often initially over-report incidents based on preliminary data."

If there is an emergency incident that might impact the community, Brasington said, refinery personnel are dispatched to monitor the air.

She said the result of the monitoring indicated none of the incidents in the May-July period impacted the community above safety thresholds set by OSHA and the state Department of Environmental Quality.

DEQ officials were not immediately able to supply information on any specific compliance orders or fines imposed on the Chalmette plant.

Steve Cannizaro can be reached at scannizaro@timespicayune.com or (504) 826-3834.

A note about the story:

Ken Ford neither founded nor is the director of the Louisiana Bucket Brigade. Anne Rolfes founded the Bucket Brigade in 2000 and remains the executive director.

LOUISIANA BUCKET BRIGADE

