GONZALES — Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) are believed to be part of the ozone-depletion problem that some scientists think will lead to the so-called “greenhouse effect” or the warming of the Earth’s atmosphere.

Hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFC) may be a temporary solution.

But environmentalists, who met representatives of Allied-Signal Inc. here on Friday, were less than enthusiastic about the company’s proposed $60 million HCFC 141b plant in Geismar.

The company announced last November its plans to produce the substitute for CFC-113 and CFC-11, which are ingredients in insulation and cleaning agents used by the electronics industry.

The project is estimated to create 70 permanent jobs and 300 temporary construction jobs at the peak of construction,
The company will use hydrogen fluoride produced at the Geismar site and will bring in by rail vinylidene chloride as the raw materials for 14lb.

Willie Fontenot of the state Attorney General's Office said, "You've been working on this sucker for a number of years."

The United States and 92 other nations signed a treaty agreeing to stop CFC production by the end of the century.

Production of substitutes, such as HCFCs, are seen as a temporary solution.

Riley said the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has labeled HCFC non-hazardous.

"This is not the answer, by any means, to the CFC dilemma," said Lanier Emery of Greenpeace. She said HCFCs "create a kind of acidic rain," may cause liver damage and also can create ozone-depletion problems when methane is present in the lower atmosphere.

Audrey Evans of Tulane Environmental Law Clinic said after the meeting she was concerned that the Allied-Signal plant in Baton Rouge will not simultaneously be reducing its CFC production with the start-up of the Geismar plant.

The Geismar plant will produce an estimated 70 million pounds of 14lb by 1994, Riley said. The Baton Rouge plant, which has cut back to its 1986 production levels, is producing an estimated 65 million pounds of CFC-113.

"I'd like to see a major presentation on what Allied-Signal plans to eliminate (from the Baton Rouge plant) . . . since that plant happens to be within a stone's throw from the state capital," Fontenot said.

Evans also expressed concern about the company's plans to seek a $20 million enterprise zone sales tax exemption. The company also may seek a 10-year industrial property tax exemption, she said.

"We are proud of our environmental record," Riley said. "We have never been fined; we have never had a fine proposed (at the Geismar site)."

The Allied-Signal Geismar complex, which straddles the Ascension-Iberville parish line, is located near the intersection of La. 3115 and River Road near Arcadian Corp. and Union-Texas Petroleum Corp.

"That is the nastiest, smelliest part of (south Louisiana)," said Chris Gaudet of the Iberville Parish environmental group AWARE.

Gaudet said a thick brown smelly haze frequently covers the area and has affected nearby vegetation.

"I have to admit I can't disagree with you," Riley said. "I'm not sure what causes that (haze)."

When Gaudet suggested that Allied-Signal work with Arcadian and UTPC to analyze and eliminate the haze, Riley said he could not make a commitment on behalf of the other two plants.

"I'm appalled at this," said Amos Favorite of Ascension Residents Against Toxic Pollution. "I thought surely all the plants worked together on pollution control . . . One hobo in the bunch will ruin all your reputations."

Favorite, who lives in Geismar, urged Riley to contact the other plant managers about the haze.

"I can't choose my air. I got to breathe it when I find it," Favorite said.

Riley tried to assure them that the company's proposed air, water and ground water emissions from the 14lb plant will not adversely affect current emission levels in the area. Company officials checked the proposed site with five soil and ground water samples to be free of contamination.

Riley said the company expects to begin construction by the second week in November, if the permits are approved.

Other environmentalists attending the meeting Friday were Kay Gaudet of AWARE, Theresa Robert of Save Ourselves Inc., Ramona Stevens of Louisiana Environmental Action Network, Darrel Stevens of ARATP, and Larry Evans of Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union and the National Toxics Campaign.