Emission reports for Ascension show little change

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GEISMAR — Annual emissions reports compiled by the 13 largest chemical companies in Ascension Parish show little reduction in their federally reportable toxic chemicals, although company officials predict big changes to come in 1993.

A state law requiring a 50 percent reduction of emissions from 1987 levels goes into effect by 1994, said L.M. "Pete" Burright of Shell Chemical in Geismar.

Many of the companies have been installing or are planning major emissions control equipment that should come online before then.

"As soon as you put them in, there'll be a drastic change," said Steve Mistretta of Triad Chemical/Ammonia Producers of Donaldsonville.

For instance, Shell Chemical is spending $20 million to install a closed circulation system that will clean processed material before it gets to the open cooling water tower.

Burright said the system is expected to reduce Shell's air emissions of ethylene glycol from 711,000 pounds in 1989 to 0 pounds in 1993 and ethylene oxide from 514,000 pounds in 1989 to 50,000 pounds in 1993.

The Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act (SARA) Title III Section 313 reports compiled by the companies show a 3.7 percent decrease in air, water and land emissions in 1989 from 1988 from the 13 chemical companies in Ascension Parish.

The National Wildlife Federation, in a national report issued earlier this week, claimed the biggest reductions in toxic emissions came from paperwork changes in reporting analysis and methods rather than actual reductions or recycling.

The Ascension Parish report prepared by the 13-member Community Awareness Emergency Response (CAER) group revealed a 4 percent increase to 47.9 million pounds of chemicals placed into injection wells; a 3 percent reduction to 47.7 million pounds of permitted, fugitive and emergency air emissions; and a 14 percent reduction to 29.7 million pounds of water discharges.

Louisiana leads the nation in the amount of toxic chemicals discharged into the air, water and land, according to the most recent federal data.

Many of the Ascension Parish companies are among the top emitters in the state.

The state Department of Environmental Quality recently ordered the top 12 emitters each in land, water and air emissions to submit plans to reduce those emissions. That included Rubicon, Shell and Vulcan Chemical on air emissions; Arcadian Corp. and CF Industries on water emissions; and BASF, Borden Chemical, Rubicon and Uniroyal Chemical on land emissions.

The CAER report revealed that five chemicals made up the majority of the emissions in the parish.

For instance, 38 million pounds of hydrochloric acid from BASF Corp. in Geismar made up 84 percent of the ground emissions in 1989.

Hydrochloric acid is used in petroleum production, food processing, pickling and metal cleaning. It also is injected into oil wells to increase oil recovery.

Ammonia, used primarily as a fertilizer, made up 84 percent of the air emissions. More than 40 million pounds of ammonia were released in 1989, mostly by Triad Chemical/Ammonia Producers, CF Industries in Donaldsonville and Borden Chemical in Geismar.

The 26 million pounds of sulfuric acid and phosphoric acid, which together make up 47 percent of the total water releases, came from Arcadian Corp. in Geismar.

Phosphoric acid is used in the production of fertilizers, animal feed supplements, pharmaceuticals and soft drinks. Sulfuric acid is used in making fertilizers, pharmaceuticals, food processing and automobile batteries.