Guste calls for ‘hard-edged’ air pollution control legislation

By BOB ANDERSON
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Louisiana’s air pollution control laws don’t provide “the hard-edged tools” to achieve clean, healthful air, according to Attorney General William Guste.

“Louisiana’s current air pollution control scheme is the result of compromises with polluting industry,” and “it is clear that federal law and state law . . . have failed to provide the people of Louisiana with safe air to breathe,” the attorney general says.

In a letter to Paul Templet, secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality, Guste says he would like to work with Templet to enact whatever legislation is necessary “to bring under control this monstrous and constitutionally illegal venting of poison gases to our air in a short time frame.”

“We would encourage the attorney general to recognize and support the hard work that is under way” to reduce emissions, said Richard Kleiner of the Louisiana Chemical Association.

“We are working with DEQ to implement the state Clean Air Act, which will cut air toxic emissions by 50 percent.

“Along with DEQ and citizens groups, we are deeply committed to and involved in cooperative efforts to develop an ozone
Questions about the extent of protection provided by Louisiana's air control laws come as a result of reports "documenting the extent to which the air of the industrial corridor between Baton Rouge and New Orleans is being used by the chemical industry as a hazardous waste disposal facility for poison gases," Guste says.

One of the reports Guste is apparently referring to is a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency document showing that more toxic chemicals are released per square mile in Louisiana than in any other state.

Releases by Louisiana industry, almost 15,000 pounds of toxic materials per square mile, are 10 times the national average, says the 400-page report, "Toxics in the Community."

"The cumulative effect of the impact of dozens of air-vented chemicals on the people of the industrial corridor has never been investigated by any public health agency, to my knowledge," Guste says. "But enough evidence exists, in my judgment, to declare the air of Baton Rouge a public health threat — where air pollution 14 days this year violated health-based standards."

"I know you have worked with tremendous diligence ... to bring under control the unconscionable toxic assault being conducted against the people of Louisiana," Guste tells Templet, "and I know the frustrations and difficulties you have confronted in that effort."

The Louisiana chemical industry already has made significant progress by reducing overall carcinogenic emissions 20 percent from 1987 to 1988, Kleiner said.