LCA upset with state publication

By BOB ANDERSON
Environmental editor

A state publication on the amounts and effects of air pollution has incensed the Louisiana Chemical Association, which thinks the publication is one-sided, inflammatory and improper.

The chemical association confirmed Monday it is asking for a list of people to whom the periodical was mailed, so LCA can send its side to readers.

The Environmental Advocate, a regular publication of the Department of Environmental Quality, quotes toxicologist Gerald Poje of the National Wildlife Federation giving his opinion that air pollution is the most serious environmental problem facing the nation.

It also quotes St. Gabriel pharmacist Kay Gaudet as saying she feels sure there is a relationship between toxic air emissions and miscarriages.

"Of the top 25 counties (parishes) on the national list for all toxic emissions, six were located in Louisiana," including East Baton Rouge and Ascension parishes, the DEQ publication states.

"We feel it's inappropriate for a publicly funded department of state government to put out something like this," said Richard Kleiner of LCA, who called the publication "biased, inflammatory and filled with unscientific ... statements about alleged health effects like benzene headaches."

Poje was quoted as saying air pollutants can have subtle health impacts, which doctors may diagnose as allergies, fatigue or stress, including headaches that can be caused by benzene. He says more than 1 million pounds of benzene — a cancer-causing chemical — were released in Louisiana in 1987.

"Yes, we have been requesting the mailing list from DEQ for quite a few days now, and we're going to request it under the Freedom of Information Act," Kleiner said. "We want an opportunity to speak to the same audience they are reaching."

DEQ Deputy Secretary Joel Lindsey
saying the agency does intend to provide LCA with the mailing list, but is looking into whether it is appropriate to charge a fee for that list, since there are costs associated with maintaining the list. The publication is sent to about 1,200 persons who have requested it or attended DEQ hearings. LCA was also invited to submit a letter on the topic, which DEQ will consider publishing in a future edition, Lindsey said.

DEQ Secretary Paul Templet said he saw no problem with the publication, calling Poje qualified and credible, and saying DEQ intends to let other people express their viewpoints in the newsletter.

"We'll probably quote Dan Borne (head of LCA) at some point, and the environmentalists will probably get upset," Templet said.

"It's time for DEQ to provide the public with factual data based on its own monitoring, and let the public make the societal decisions," Kleiner said. "I don't see anything in here (the Environmental Advocate) that's been generated by DEQ other than the normal enforcement actions."

In addition to dealing with environmental issues, the publication includes lists of companies that have received citations alleging environmental violations.

"We breathe 15 thousand liters of air every day," Poje says in the Environmental Advocate. "Our lungs are exposed to a lot of air contamination even if it is present in only tiny amounts. "This could be worse than having contaminated drinking water or contaminated drinking water or contaminated food," he says. "We can always change the source of our food or change the source of our water."

"But we have no choice on which type of air we breathe," he says. "That is not a choice our children will be able to make either."