PCB storage facility shutdown requested

By TIM TALLEY
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CONVENT — Angry St. James Parish residents asked authorities Saturday to shut down a PCB storage facility operated by Rollins Field Services until more is learned about the company and its operation.

About 350 people attended a public hearing on the proposed storage of PCBs that outlined plans for a PCB storage facility at the former Romeville Elementary School and heard several speakers request that the hearing on Rollins' plans before its PCB facility is allowed to operate.

Rev. Tom Naughton, director of the Manresa House of Retreats in Convent, questioned whether the state of Louisiana and the Mississippi River is an appropriate location for Rollins' PCB facility.

"Why make this parish more deadly than it already is," said Danny St. Pierre, a member of the parish's Planning Commission.

Following a 15-minute presentation by Rollins spokesman Charles Swinburn, many residents said they want to know more about the company, its PCB storage facility and the potential risks of PCB contamination in the environment.

"We'd like to know what are the worst, possible things that could happen in the case of any spillage of PCBs, PCB-contaminated material," said Patricia Melancon of Convent.

Do they have an adequate number of people to monitor this? I doubt that seriously, she said.

What is the use of being able to earn a living when our environment is being taken away. said St. Pierre.

"Who gave them permission to come into our parish? Does anybody in this parish have a say-so," said citizen Gwen Pierre.

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PCB

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Hatcher.

Rollins field services manager Joe Nassar read a resolution adopted by the School Board earlier Tuesday that satisfactory environment conditions for Rollins from operating the PCB site, which is only one-quarter mile away from Romeville Elementary.

Some speakers leveled criticism at the parish's elected officials for not hearing about Rollins' plans to locate the PCB facility in the parish until it already was open.

Rollins officials agreed to halt the flow of PCBs in the parish until the public hearing with the facility. The public hearing was held Wednesday.

Rollins is taking out of their mouth, said resident Imelda West.

"We're so concerned about black and white. Black and white is not the issue - the issue is green," Mrs. West said in a reference to the profit Rollins hopes to make from its PCB facility.

"Who is going to get rich doing this? How is this going to help St. James Parish," asked Mrs. Hatcher.

Jackie Chavigny of Convent, who repeated a remark attributed to parish President Paul Keller that the Rollins facility is "100 percent safe." She said Keller is one of very few people in the building who feel that way. Other than Keller, no one spoke in favor of the facility.

Several speakers questioned whether the parish's fire departments and other emergency services are adequately equipped and trained to deal with an emergency at the Rollins site.

The Rev. Richard McGinnis, pastor of St. Michael's Catholic Church in Convent, said the River Road is not suitable for the heavy truck traffic that will be associated with the PCB facility.

Swinburn said Rollins' facility will handle old electrical transformers that contain PCBs, short for polychlorinated biphenyls.

The chemical is toxic, is known cancer-causing agent and is one of the most dangerous substances known to man.

Swinburn said the facility, which is located on the former Romeville Elementary School campus in Convent, will accept the transformers, drain them of oil containing PCBs, rinse them with diesel fuel and ship the liquid wastes to a Rollins incinerator facility in Deer Park, Texas. The transformer cylinders will be buried at an approved landfill in Nevada, he said.

Swinburn said the operation will be safe and will present no dangers to either the public or Rollins employees. The company hopes to ship one or two railroad tank cars of PCB wastes each month from the facility for incineration elsewhere, he said.

"It is our intent to be a good neighbor in St. James Parish. We feel we have absolutely nothing to hide with this operation," said Charles Swinburn, Rollins spokesman.

The state will require Rollins to submit to periodic inspection of its facility because it will be classified as a generator of hazardous waste, said George Kraemer of the Louisiana Environmental Protection Agency.

"I assure you that we will enforce the law to the maximum degree to the authority we have to do so," said John Koury, assistant secretary of DEQ.