Processors have no place to dump shells

By DIANE RUSSELL
Acadiana writer

HENDERSON - Dumping alternatives are looking grave for crawfish processors in St. Martin Parish - the parish landfill is closed and the two Henderson plants designed to turn crawfish waste into useful products can't get temporary state approval to begin operations without air pollution devices.

"This is putting the parish and the crawfish industry in a deplorable state of affairs," said Police Juror Jerry Durand, the chairman of the parish solid waste committee.

Durand added that the parish solid waste program and the parish in general is suffering a "tremendous set back" because of a government agency.

The Department of Environmental quality (DEQ) refused to issue a temporary permit to Acadiana Processors Inc. (API), which will extract the red pigment from crawfish shells for use as a food dye.

API is waiting on a "scrubber" that has been on order since January. The scrubber, which fits into the air vents and eliminates impurities and odors, has to be specially manufactured and shipped.

"DEQ refused to allow us to ignore air pollution laws through this crawfish season," said Gerard Durand, Sr., chairman of API's board. "We were hoping to open tomorrow (Saturday), but now we have to wait until we get the scrubber in place."

Area residents complained about smell from another plant, Seafood By-Products, which prompted DEQ to deny the temporary permit to API.

The Police Jury was forced to close the only parish crawfish dump in Grand Anse because it no longer complied with DEQ standards.

So processors were bringing waste to Seafood By-Products which voluntarily shut down Thursday because of fear of losing its emission license.

Seafood By-Products processes crawfish shells into meal for chicken and fish feed.

Both plants complied with the DEQ in every aspect but were running up against time with the specially designed air emission devices, Jerry Durand said.

Now, crawfish processors are faced with where to dispose of the shells as the April-December crawfish season gets into full swing.

The only alternatives are shutting down completely or find somewhere else to dump.

"I can't say what's going to happen but dumping in the waterways used to be the way it was done before," he said. "It's really a natural means of disposal anyway."

Officials with Acadiana Processors said wastes will be stored in a holding bin until they're ready to be processed. The bin will be closed and sealed to control odors.

During processing, emission control stacks will "subdue the odor" and no problems with smell are anticipated, the board chairman explained.

"We took it for an eight-hour test run recently," Gerard Durand said. "And, there was no odor, no nothing, even without the scrubber."

API processes the pigmented oil that is attracting overseas buyers because it is a pure and natural protein.

Orders have already been placed by the Japanese for use as a food coloring.