State says Ethyl violated air standards

By BOB ANDERSON
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State air quality officials say Ethyl Corp. has caused air quality standards for lead to be violated near its plant and have prepared a draft order instructing the company to raise its exhaust stacks and take other actions to protect Baton Rouge air.

Ethyl said it has not violated standards and to its knowledge has created no health problems. The area to which models indicate the highest levels of lead drift is not populated, the company added.

Ethyl “has and is allowing lead to become airborne from its furnaces” in amounts that cause the air quality standard for lead to be exceeded, according to the draft order.

That determination is based on “state of the art atmospheric dispersion modeling, using meteorological data of 1975 through 1979,” DNR said.

DNR officials held a public meeting on the draft order Thursday, but only representatives of Ethyl attended.

The draft order will probably only have minor changes made as a result of the Ethyl comments, said Bharat Contractor, who is handling the matter.

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Ethyl

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for DNR.

“Ethyl does not know of a single instance in the past 45 years where exposure to lead emitted by the Ethyl plant has caused health problems to any residents living in the vicinity of the plant or to any other person,” Ethyl said in a statement submitted to DNR.

The company said it has spent millions of dollars to keep the release of lead into the environment at a minimum.

Ethyl said DNR has issued the order “in spite of overwhelming evidence that the ambient air lead levels in the community are well under the standard.”

The location where the air standards are said to be violated is west of the site where there are no residents, only a tank farm with no full-time personnel, Ethyl said.

The regulations should define ambient air as only air in areas where people live, Ethyl said.

Federal regulations on lead have become increasingly strict as studies have indicated that hundreds of thousands of preschool children have excessive levels of lead in their blood.

Lead can be absorbed by the lungs as well as by ingestion, and high levels can be fatal. Lower levels can result in symptoms harder to detect, such as retarded brain development, intelligence and learning ability, and it can suppress fertility.

Ethyl said tests by health officials have indicated there is no problem of high lead concentrations in the blood of Baton Rouge children.

Unless changed in the final writing, the order will instruct Ethyl to take the following action:

- Raise exhaust stacks of each reverberatory furnace to 179 feet.
- To emit no more than 0.4 grams of lead per second for any reverberatory furnace and not emit more than 0.145 grams of lead per second for the rotary furnace.
- To operate no more than five furnaces at one time at...
reverberatory furnaces at any one time at those emission rates.

- Submit quarterly reports showing progress on the stack construction and giving emission rates for each furnace.

Refusal to comply with the order will result in a fine of up to $50,000 a day, the order states.