Toxic releases in state down by 35 percent

By BOB ANDERSON
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Louisiana industry made major reductions in discharges of toxic chemicals in 1989, but the state will still be a national leader in such releases, Louisiana’s top environmental official said Monday.

Industry reduced toxic releases in Louisiana by 35 percent in 1989, information released by the Department of Environmental Quality indicates.

DEQ Secretary Paul Templet said he hopes that will put Louisiana behind Texas and Ohio as the national leaders in toxic emissions, but the possibility that it may not indicates “we came from a place we shouldn’t have been.”

“We’ve still got a ways to go,” Templet said. Louisiana will probably still be first or second when the 1989 data is compared nationally, he said.

East Baton Rouge Parish ranked fourth among the state’s parishes in toxic releases to the air and seventh in total toxic releases and transfers, according to the report released Monday.

Industries reported 8.1 million pounds of discharges of toxic air pollutants in East Baton Rouge Parish.

Other area parishes with high air discharges were Ascension with 46.3 million pounds, St. James with 17.6 million pounds and Iberville with 6.6 million pounds.

A total of 482.5 million pounds of toxic chemicals were reported released into the state’s air, land and water, the report states. That is down from 742.7 million pounds in 1988.

In reality, those figures are only a portion of the total toxic releases, because motorists don’t have to report their discharges and many companies don’t have to either, depending on the type of firm and whether it employs 10 or more people.

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There was an 80 percent reduction statewide in releases to water, according to the report. Most of that 111 million-pound reduction “can be attributed to differences in rainfall patterns at certain facilities.” That is particularly true of large gypsum stacks, where contaminated rainwater is discharged, Templet said.

There was a 33 percent reduction of injection of toxic wastes into deep wells and a 4 percent reduction in toxic emissions to the air, the report states. There was a 59 percent increase in land disposal.

The report cites the following industries for taking positive steps in reducing the amount of toxic chemicals they discharge:

- Agrico for major reductions of water discharges at its plants in St. Charles and St. James parishes.
- Ciba-Geigy Corp. for reducing toluene emissions to the air by 56 percent from its 1987 levels.
- LaRoche Chemicals in St. James Parish for reduction of chlorine discharges by 82 percent.
- Shell Oil Co. for plans to eliminate all toxic chemical releases to the land by 1995.