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2 firms top toxic list

By Rae Tyson
USA TODAY

Chemical makers Du Pont and Monsanto are the top companies pumping 5.8 billion tons of toxics into the environment, says a report out Wednesday.

Though the total is "staggering," Citizen Action praised industries for cutting emissions by 18% since last year's report.

"In the long run, toxic reduction means good health as well as good economics," says Citizen Action's Robert Brandon.

The report, based on Environmental Protection Agency data for 1989, also found:

- 100 of 8,300 firms filing account for 60% of emissions.
- Monsanto's Alvin, Texas, plant — making ingredients for detergents and plastics — produced the most toxins. Monsanto says most went into a deep well, posing no danger.
- Du Pont's Towanda, Pa., site — making film products — released the most cancer-causing chemicals. "We're taking steps to reduce those numbers," says John McAllister.
- Magnesium Corp. of America in Tooele, Utah, was the biggest air polluter.

▶ Worst polluting town, 6A

STATESLINE

FROM USA TODAY'S NATIONAL NEWS NETWORK

Neighbors of Texas plant feel no threat from its pollutants

By Maria Puente
USA TODAY

ALVIN, Texas — Residents of this east Texas community are proud of the fact that this is home to Texas Ranger Nolan Ryan, called by many baseball's greatest pitcher.

The news that Alvin also is home of the USA's greatest toxic polluter was met Wednesday with a rousing "so what."

Citizen Action, a Washington, D.C.-based environmental group, released a report naming the Monsanto petrochemical plant at Chocolate Bayou, 15 miles outside Alvin, as the USA's largest volume polluter.

"Aw, come on! We never noticed it so it can't be all that bad," laughs D.M. Brown, a waiter at Joe's Barbeque.

In fact, the real environmental controversy around here isn't Monsanto or Amoco or any of the other half-dozen leviathan petrochemical plants that look like spiked spaceships on the vast, flat landscape southeast of Houston.

Residents say they're far more upset about the medical waste incinerator in the middle of a residential area. And it's not even listed in the phone book, much less on an environmentalist's list of polluters.

Monsanto says 90% of the waste it releases is ammonium sulfate diluted with water — and it ends up in a deep well on plant property that's nearly a mile and a half underground.

"If it wasn't for the ammonium sulfate in the injection wells, we wouldn't be on anyone's list," says plant spokesman Don Meade.



By Donna Carson

TOWN'S CONCERN: Carolyn Wenglar stands in front of a billboard on her property protesting a medical waste incinerator across the street. She blames her family's medical problems on the plant.

Sally Spann, director of the Chamber of Commerce in Alvin, says ammonium sulfate is not anything anyone would sprinkle on cornflakes, but it's not high on the government's list of dangerous substances.

Tim Curtis, director of Texas Citizen Action, concedes that ammonium sulfate is toxic to fish, not humans.

"But who knows what it's doing to the water supply?" Curtis asks.

Sandra Hinze has raised five children, two grandchildren and dozens of horses, cows and puppies in a house six miles from the Monsanto plant. No one's been sick, the water tastes fine and the air smells just like it always does during the swampy Texas summers, she says.

"The dump," she says, "smells worse."

Texas is crammed with the kinds of companies that make environmentalists shudder, however the petrochemical industry is crucial to the state's economy — including Alvin's.

Alvin Junior High Principal Linda Robinson does worry about the safety of Monsanto's deep wells.

"But they're committed to doing something about it, and they've never tried to hide or cover up what they're doing," she says.

Monsanto spends $5 million a year on environmental controls, Meade says, and has won awards from state and federal authorities for its efforts.

Robinson, also a member of the community's liaison council with Monsanto, says most people support the company and not just because it employs more than 1,000 people in the area. She says Monsanto has done a lot for the community, of 20,000, including financial support for the school district.

▶ Toxic report, 1A

The USA's biggest polluters

The manufacturing corporations and specific plants that released the most toxic chemicals in 1989, according to the watchdog group Citizen Action:

10 BIGGEST CORPORATE POLLUTERS

Du Pont Co.	3M
Monsanto Co.	Vulcan Chemicals
American Cyanamid	General Motors
BP America Inc.	Eastman Kodak Co.
Renco Group	Phelps Dodge Corp.

10 PLANTS WITH HIGHEST RELEASES, IN POUNDS

Monsanto Co., Alvin, Texas	206,539,208
American Cyanamid Co., Fortier Plant, Westwego, La.	192,350,800
Magnesium Corp. of America, Tooele, Utah	119,060,425
Vulcan Chemicals, Wichita, Kan.	92,349,716
Du Pont Beaumont Works, Beaumont, Texas	68,094,964
BP Chemicals Green Lake, Port Lavaca, Texas	65,543,672
Du Pont Johnsonville Plant, New Johnsonville, Tenn.	57,373,345
Inland Steel Co., East Chicago, Ind.	57,273,300
BP Chemicals Inc., Lima, Ohio	56,731,350
Atochem Inc., Racon facility, Wichita, Kan.	54,505,751

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