Reynolds plant accused of ducking discharge regulation

By DON RODMAN
The Coastal Bend ... nservation Association has ...arged that Reynolds Metals ... is using "devious means" ... discharge sewage and plant ...stes into La Quinta Channel. ...mpany officials say there is ... waste water" discharged ...om their plants.

H. C. Cooke of Ingleside, ...esident of the association, ...d yesterday that he had filed ... complaint with the Coast ...ard several weeks ago ...king that the U.S. attorney ...neral take action against ...ynolds.

"Since 1968," Cooke said, ...eynolds Metals has used a ...rious means of discharging the effluent from their sewer and plant waste into La Quinta Channel and Corpus Christi Bay."

"They do not have a discharge permit and have dumped plant waste material into a storm sewer which is backed up by a small dam on the bank of La Quinta Channel. Each heavy rainfall flushes this effluent material over the dam and into the channel and Corpus Christi Bay," Cooke charged.

He said the charge is based on aerial photos and water samples taken at the mouth of the storm ditch by International Divers and tested by Pope Laboratories of Dallas.

Mort Handelman, technical assistant to the manager of the Reynolds Sherwin Plant, said the plant's sewage effluent — "which gets secondary treatment that will match anybody's" — does run into the ditch and is recycled into the plants' production system.

He said, however, that no water containing plant wastes is being put into the ditch and that the only water that leaves the plant is that lost by evaporation from cooling towers, settling ponds and the storm ditch itself.

"We have to recycle," Handelman said. "If we did not we would use 30 to 40 times as much water as we do."

He noted that the storm ditch drains most of the farm land adjacent to the two Reynolds plants and Texas Hill. The plants have pumps along it which can pump up to four million gallons a day into the aluminum processing system, he said, and the dam at the end of the ditch is 16 feet tall.

"We very rarely have discharges — maybe three or four times a year. With rainfall here about two inches a month, we can contain up to about 7½ inches in a 24-hour period. If we have more than 3 inches in 24 hours, then we have a discharge," Handelman said.

He noted that the Corps of Engineers requires permits for all discharges into navigable waters but that Reynolds had explained its situation to the Corps which checked with the Environmental Protection Agency, and that both agreed no permit was needed.

Paul Kutchinski, district supervisor for the Texas Water Quality Board, said he had inspected the storm ditch and indicated that no violations of state regulations had been found. He said he feels the size of the runoff collection dam is adequate to contain runoff other most rains. He said there has to be a limit somewhere on how much runoff an industry is required to retain on its property.

Cooke said that the EPA regional office in Dallas had confirmed the storm sewer discharge and that the association's request for action is based on this. He said there was an EPA inspection of the site about three months ago.

The association has asked the U.S. Attorney's Office that Reynolds be fined $1,000 for each rainfall in excess of 2 inches since 1968 for the "illegal discharge."

"We are asking that they correct it," Cooke said. "They should either admit they have a discharge and get a permit or correct it."

He said that material flushed over the dam has formed a delta extending out toward the channel. He said the association-financed analysis of sediments in the delta showed in parts per million: Zinc—250, Mercury—0.9, Antimony—800 and Titanium—5,000.

Handelman said Reynolds and several pollution control agencies have run many tests of bay and channel silts near the Reynolds plants and "there is nobody that has found any unusually high concentrations."

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He said that there is some bauxite entering the bay west of the plants as some of the ore is washed from large government-owned stockpiles there. He said, however, that there is no harmful effect because the bauxite contains no undesirable substances.

"We absolutely do not have a water problem," Handelman said. "We have one of the only aluminum complexes in the world without a (waste water) discharge."

He emphasized that the only water put in the storm ditch by Reynolds is treated sewage generated by 2,000 employes and cooling water used in aluminum production. "None of this water has any contact with the product. We pick it all up and pump it into our process in the Sherwin plant," he said.

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