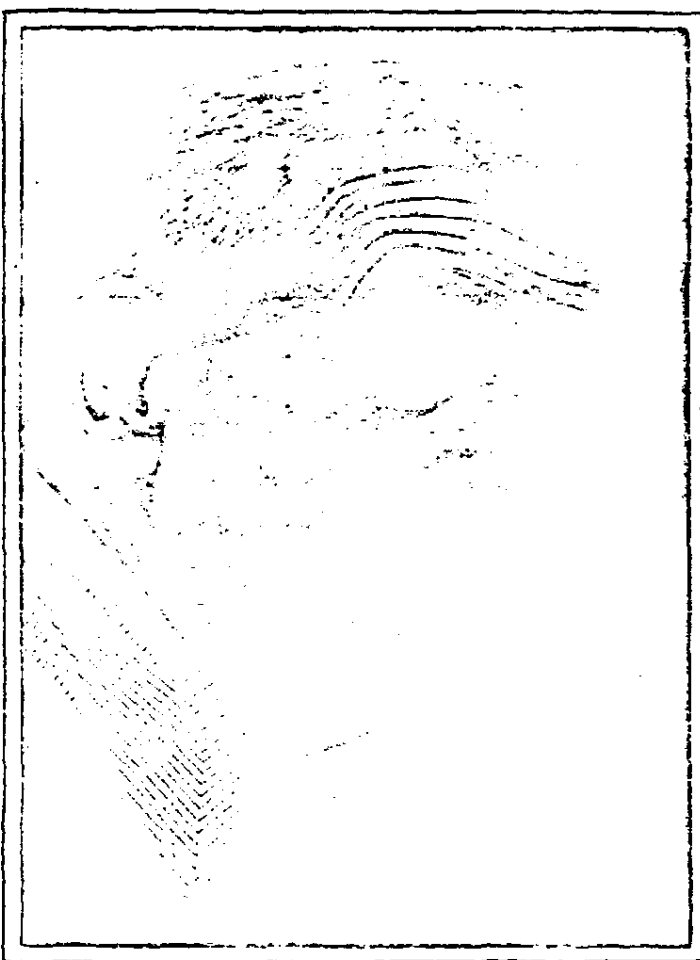


INBETWEEN

August, 1979

#54



A Modest Proposal...

CLEMENTS FOR PRESIDENT!

(See page 10)

Editorial

In January of 1979 the citizens of Galveston voted overwhelmingly to stop inflationary taxation. It is time for these same citizens to once again rally and stop an inflationary rate increase request by Houston and Lighting Power Co. The utility company has applied for a 20% rate increase—a full 13% over President Carter's anti-inflation guidelines.

We feel this rate increase request is unnecessary and inflationary. The utility employs a double standard. Why is it they can pass through fuel cost increases but will not pass through to the consumer decreases in costs? Did anyone see a decrease on their light bill because HL&P's Galveston property taxes were lowered by \$61,000 due to the revaluation of property? No. All we got was a 20% rate increase request.

This money grab can be stopped. The light company must go before our City Council for permission to increase utility rates. We urge you to remind your elected officials of the mandate you gave them on January 20, 1979. In plain terms, we are tired of runaway costs imposed on the public by unelected bureaucracies. The Light Company's 20% rate increase is beyond the bounds of reason. Let's hope our elected officials are more reasonable and realize that.

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#54

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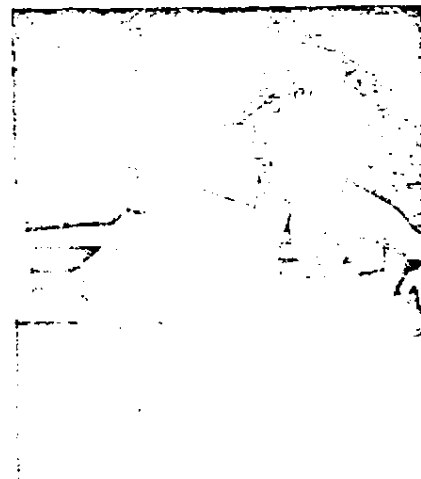


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Chemical waste pits emit vinyl chloride.

Living Next Door to Cancer

© by Lee Hochberg

At least six hundred residents of La Marque were exposed to possibly deadly amounts of vinyl chloride between 1973 and 1978.

The Texas Air Control Board (TACB) knows that any of the people may be developing liver cancer as a result, and so does the Galveston County Health District. The only people who don't know are the six hundred residents themselves.

These people are in the dark about their exposure to vinyl chloride because the TACB thought that it would be best not to tell them about it.

The TACB officials reasoned that not disclosing the problem would avoid unnecessary panic. According to the TACB, vinyl chloride in the La Marque area may or may not cause cancer and they felt nothing could be gained by disclosing the problem. But these same TACB officials are admitting that they would never take the risk of living where those 600 unknowingly did. The threat to health is that real.

In concern are 600 people who between 1973 and 1978 lived in the Sunflower Mobile Home Park, a trailer camp which backed up upon the so-called Petro-Processors Waste Pits near the Texas City Wye.

The seven open waste pits in that area are between 12 and 25 feet deep and contain nearly 100,000 barrels of highly toxic industrial wastes. In July of 1978, the Texas Air Control Board discovered that carcinogenic vinyl chloride levels downwind from the pits at the trailer camp were three times the acceptable health level. The TACB warned

in an inter-office report that "people in the nearby residential areas are being exposed to concentrations in excess of a recommended health standard."

But to this date, those people have not been warned and the TACB has no intention to change that. "The damage was already done," says TACB Regional Supervisor Lloyd Stewart. "We need to concentrate on the present and the future, not the past. We didn't have the need or the time to tell everyone."

Emissions of carcinogenic vinyl chloride continue today, and are only one of three significant health dangers originating from the Petro-Processor Pits. As vinyl chloride slides downwind through the La Marque air, the underground water table is being permeated by some extremely toxic metallic and organic contaminants that, according to Tom Kearns of the Texas Water Rights Commission, could enter the Galveston Bay marine food chain and eventually cause

continued p. 34

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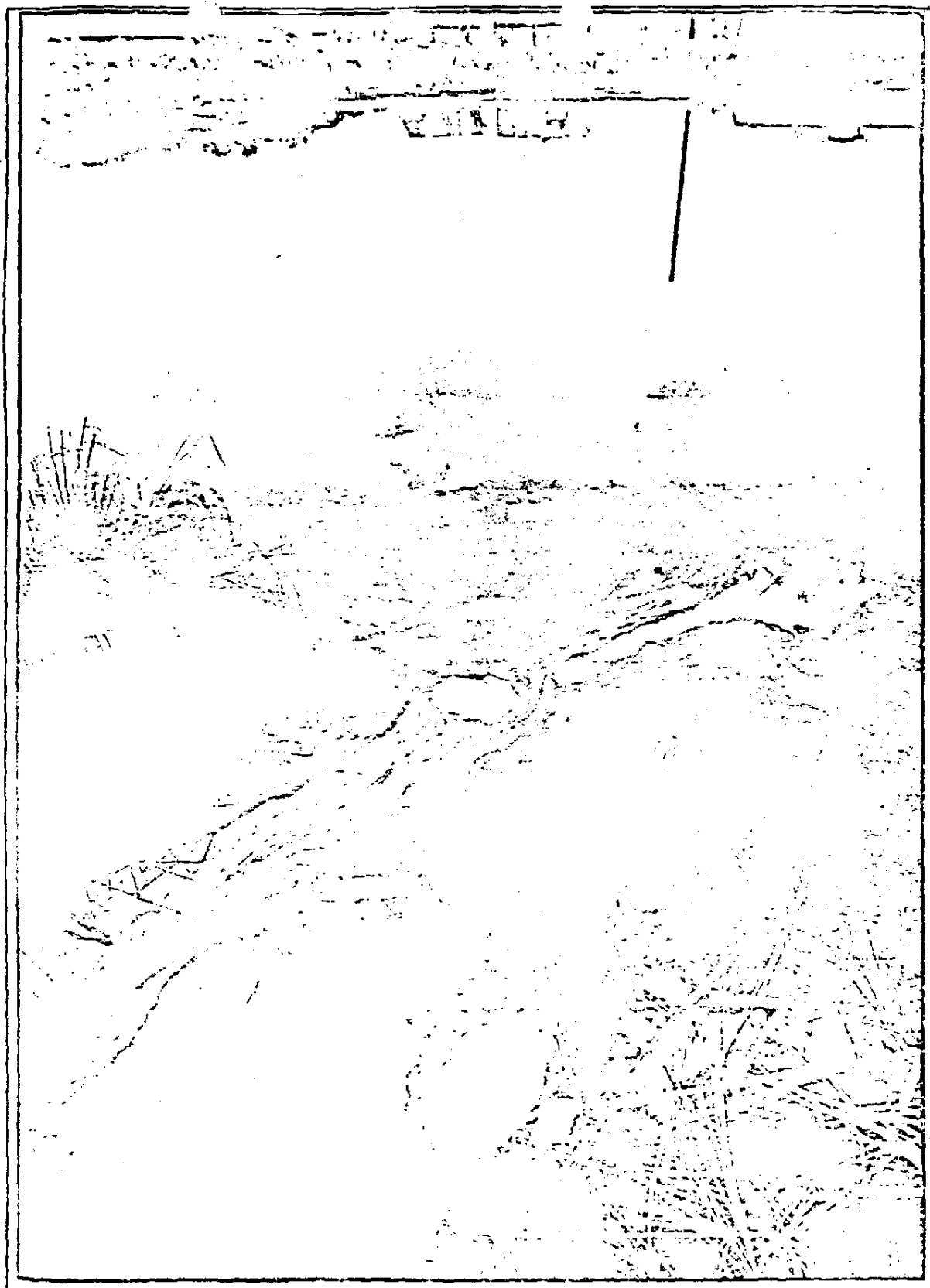
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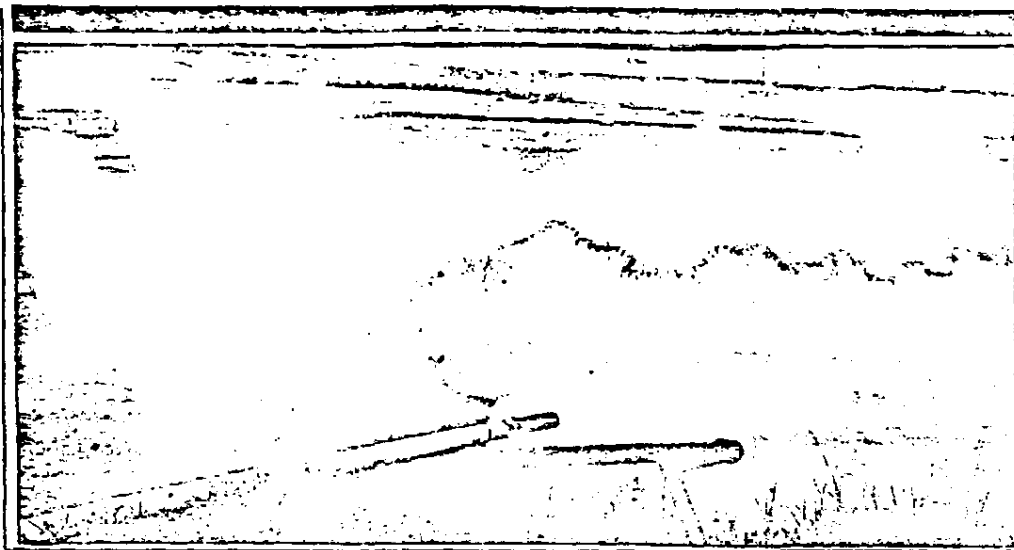
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IN BETWEEN 31

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View of chemical waste pits with exposed 55 gallon drums of acid.

serious human illness not unlike the mercury poisoning that killed 67 persons and permanently disabled 331 others six years ago in Japan.

And if these hazards weren't enough, several unlabeled drums of highly toxic chemicals are spewn across the ground around the open pits, luring opportunistic chemical dealers to the valuable drums without knowledge of the deadly materials inside.

But there is no doubt the vinyl chloride represents the biggest health hazard. The trailer camp was closed in November of 1978 for tax reasons, according to owner Robert Nesmith of Houston, and not until *In Between* told him this week of TACB's discovery of excess vinyl chloride emissions was he informed of the health threat. "Wow," he mused. "It's a good thing we got out of there. I had thought about redeveloping the property, but it stinks so bad there is no way I can lure people back. But nobody told me it was dangerous."

Dr. Norman Trieff, Co-Director of the Division of Environmental Toxicology at the UTMB Department of Preventative Medicine and Community Health, would have told him. "In light of those facts, I sure wouldn't live there," he said. "Vinyl chloride is a known carcinogen of the human liver, and also causes glial tumors in the brain and respiratory tumors in humans." Trieff speculated that the vinyl chloride levels at the trailer homes introduced a "definite possi-

bility" of liver cancer in perhaps one or two residents, especially any resident who drank moderately to heavily or made common use of the sedative drug phenobarbital. Trieff also wondered if the chemical had caused any mutagenic birth defects in babies born to Sunflower Motor Homes residents; if father or mother was exposed to the carcinogen at the time of conception, the child might have suffered such effects.

Trieff cautioned that no assurance exists that any La Marque trailerowner was affected by high vinyl chloride emissions. The cancer takes several years to develop and without word from the TACB, affected individuals have little reason to be suspicious. But Trieff called the TACB silence about vinyl chloride emissions, "unethical, immoral, and maybe illegal."

But TACB official Stewart maintained that no value would have come from informing the trailer park residents. "Fear would have breathed fear and we would have found ourselves in a runaway situation," he said. "If we had gone door-to-door, people would have said, 'Oh, my God, is it dangerous?' and we wouldn't have known what to say."

Only in California has an air safety standard for vinyl chloride been established, though its maximum of 10 parts per billion is widely accepted across the United States. TACB's Stewart called the California standard "an educated guess" and pooh-poohed the TACB laboratory reading of 30 parts per billion

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View of

(three time the trailer didn't want out," he said the trailer so that solve

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View of Chemical wastes seeping from dump pits.

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(three times the California limit) found in the trailer park as inconclusive. "We just didn't want to make people panic and move out," he said. "A month later, we heard the trailer park was closing for other reasons, so that solved all our problems."

As for the problems of those who might have already contracted cancer, Stewart implied that such was the risk of living in the area, and the residents already knew that. "A trailer park tends to attract transient people, anyway, and if they are going to live in the Texas City area, they're going to be exposed to things even worse than vinyl chloride. I don't see what we would have accomplished by going door-to-door."

"But we were very uncomfortable about the entire situation, I admit."

The TACB first became aware of the vinyl chloride danger in February, 1978. Dominguez and Sapp Enterprises contracted with the owners of the waste pits, Motco, Inc., to remove several thousand barrels of styrene tars from the pit, to be delivered to Southern Pacific in Houston. But JOC Oil Co. (Southern Pacific's original source of styrene tar extender and thus a competitor of Dominguez and Sapp) discovered that Houstonians near the Southern Pacific plant were complaining of headaches and were worried about the health of their young children. Suspecting that the styrene tar from the La Marque pit was somehow contaminat-

ed, JOC blew the whistle to the TACB, which measured extremely high vinyl chloride content in the Southern Pacific area. The TACB immediately ordered that if Southern Pacific were to continue the use of styrene from those pits that it take out a permit for vinyl chloride and purchase equipment to lower emissions. Southern Pacific instead simply canceled the contract with Dominguez and Sapp for the contaminated styrene and returned to its original vendor.

Then the TACB investigation shifted to La Marque, where officials recorded vinyl chloride readings of 30,000 parts per million in the pits, surging to 80,000 parts per million when the tar was heated. Local officials were appalled. "Now that carcinogen is just sitting there," laments La Marque Mayor Ronny Crowder. "If the TACB had left Southern Pacific alone, it might be out of this area now. The TACB eliminated a useful process."

Where did the vinyl chloride come from in the first place? Nobody is really sure, nor do they know how much is in the seven pits. The pits had originally been excavated to provide soil for U. S. Highway 75. In 1959, Petro-Processors began to use them as a reclamation center for recovery of recyclable materials from Monsanto's waste styrene tars. The recycling operation was abandoned

(Body of text continued on page 36)

PIERSON'S BACK TO SCHOOL CHECK LIST

- ✓ **BIB OVERALLS** - Corduroy - Denim - Wool
- ✓ **OCEAN PACIFIC SHIRTS** - Boys' & Men's
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CHEMICAL PITS

Several 55 gallon drums are also resting on the bottom of the pits, their contents and origin unknown.

in 1961 after inundation from Hurricane Carla, and from 1961 to 1968 the land was used as a dump ground for styrene tars, oily wastes, spent acids, and metallic catalysts as copper chloride, mercuric chloride, elemental lead and mercury. Apparently, vinyl chloride bottoms were included in the waste. Several 55 gallon drums are also resting on the bottom of the pits, their contents and origin unknown.

And none of the industries or trucking companies which have dumped the wastes are admitting to having kept records of the materials (although environmentalists claim trucking companies always file bills of lading, and that industries keep track of wastes for future use in the reclamation process). A Texas Water Rights Commission investigation has been halfhearted at best; a TWRC form letter asking all involved parties what materials are in the pits got little or no response last year and no subsequent effort has since been made.

Whenever it came from, experts are expressing surprise at the continuing amounts of vinyl chloride that are still venting from the pits. "An air-conditioned car going 80 down Route 146 isn't going to have any problems," says Kearns. "But when I'm up there, I make sure I stay upwind, and I'm not kidding." He's fortunate to know of a danger that 600 people didn't.

"When I'm up there (at the site) I make sure I stay upwind, and I'm not kidding."

Kearns is forced to make several trips annually to the site to investigate another major health threat—the seepage and overflow of liquid contaminants in the pits into adjoining properties. The pits are unlined.

A 1975 TWRC study showed that contents of the pits were in "hydrological communication with shallow ground water,"

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and the natural interaction of bottoms with "waste has" and has caused oil contamination.

Those waste elemental materials as copper catalysts as copper catalysts warn the contamination continues, some can be expected the Galveston series of that the water Dr. James F. photograph the death of life in a pay bay. "The just a seep said. "The now the a

"The seeping The pits absorb animal next."

No evidence of water (it has yet been closest possibility of metallic contamination; water. "W says Kearns

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and the natural pern- ility of the underly-
ing soil had been markedly increased after
interaction of the styrene and vinyl chloride
bottoms with the clay. The result is that
"waste has permeated deep and laterally,
and has caused a high content of metal and
oil contamination in the ground water."

Those wastes include deadly amounts of
elemental mercury and lead, and such caty-
lysts as copper chloride and mercuric chloride.
Kearns warned that if, over several years,
the contamination of the ground water con-
tinues, some "very serious health effects"
can be expected as the contaminants enter
the Galveston Bay food chain. And a frighten-
ing series of aerial photographs indicates
that the water has, indeed, reached the bay.
Dr. James Parker of La Marque strikingly
photographed (through infrared photography)
the death of the chlorophyl layer of plant
life in a path leading from the pits to the
bay. "The earth between those points is
just a seeping mass of pollution," Parker
said. "The plants are obviously absorbing it—
now the animals of the bay are next."

**"The earth is just a
seeping mass of pollution.
The plants are obviously
absorbing it—now the
animals of the bay are
next."**

No evidence of contamination of the drink-
ing water (drawn from a lower water strata)
has yet been uncovered; samples from the two
closest potable water wells showed no evi-
dence of contamination from organic or
metallic compounds. But the TWRC is not
maintaining a constant monitor on the area
water. "We just don't have the money,"
says Kearns.

The usual avenue of funding a monitoring
procedure is to require monies from the
owner of the dangerous property. It is un-
available in this case, because Moico Inc.
(the owner of the pits) declared bankruptcy
in 1976. The assets of the company have
not yet been distributed from bankruptcy
court. So the federal agencies, claiming lack
of funds, have only watched as the con-
taminants spread.

And watching those contaminants spread is
not a difficult task after a heavy rainfall.

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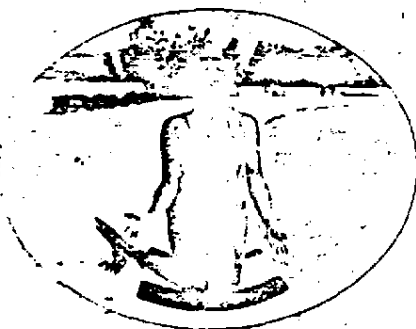
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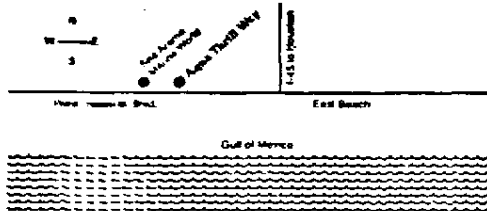
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CHEMICAL HAZARDS

"I sure do worry about a hurricane but I feel there's nothing I could do about it. The state agencies just aren't doing their job."

admit pollution officials. A Galveston County Health District study admits that moderate levels of organic contamination, including excessive levels of copper, lead, and manganese run off from the pits after rainfall. "I lost six acres of my land when the trailer park was there," owner Nesmith resigns. "The styrene would flow in after rain and embed in the soft earth. It would look safe to walk on until you fell to your ankles in tar."

The state filed charges against Motco in 1976, reporting that wastes from the pits were flowing into drainage ditches which emptied into Jones Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. Like earlier TWRC orders against Motco, the charges were ignored and no action was taken.

In the aftermath of Tropical Storm Claudette, officials shudder at the effect a hurricane storm tide might have on the pits which are three feet above sea level. "I sure do worry about a hurricane," said Mayor Crowder of La Marque. "But I feel there's nothing I can do about it. The state agencies just aren't doing their job."

Similar failure has plagued the state's attempts to clean up a third major health hazard at the pits. More than 100 large drums of extremely toxic chemicals lay haphazardly about the site. TWRC correspondence says the drums were "ostensibly brought to the site (by Dominquez and Sapp) to treat the oily waste," but the company closed down its operation and left the drums "to create a new hazard."

The TWRC ordered Dominquez and Sapp to remove the drums almost one year ago, only to find late last month that at least 90 were still there. "The drums include acids, caustics, chlorinated solvents and hydrofluoric acid," a new report shows. "Now they are old, severely corroded, mislabeled or not labeled, and severely swollen." The drums are completely exposed to the elements and public access unrestricted, and the TWRC says the drums have been tampered with of late, probably by unsuspecting chemical dealers in search of valuable empty 55 gallon drums. "They don't know what they're getting into," Kearns said. "These drums are a serious threat to the environment and a very real public health hazard." But besides a repeated

continued p. 41

The TACB in Austin last month committed some funds to assist in the cleanup—\$102,000 to be used not to cleanup the pollution, but to study it.

request to Dominquez and Sapp for removal of the drums, the TWRC has taken no action.

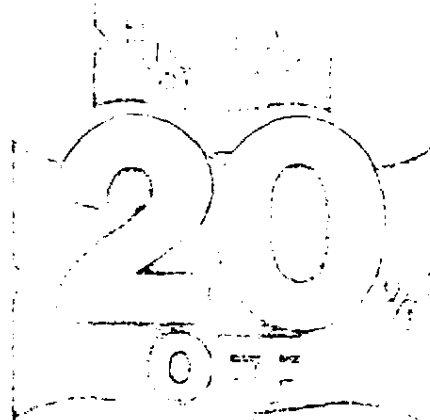
Officials at TACB and TWRC are admittedly concerned about the pits, about cancer-causing vinyl chloride, about poisons in the ground water, about toxic chemicals in easy walking distance of Route 146. But all insist there is nothing they can do. A complete cleanup of the pits would cost nearly five million dollars, Kearns said, and that kind of money is unavailable to them. The effort to divide up Motco's assets is bogged down in court and has been for over a year; TWRC has put a claim for some of that money, but Kearns has no idea if or when that will come through.

State Senator Babe Schwartz made an effort to introduce a bill in this year's senate that would have diverted some state funds to the cleanup process, but that bill died in committee.

Almost as an insult, the TACB in Austin last month committed some funds to assist in the cleanup—\$102,000 to be used not to clean-up the pollution, but to study it. "That's all we can do for now, until we get some funds," Kearns said.

And as pollution officials in Houston, Austin, and Washington lament from nine to five about their lack of funds and enforcement failures, residents of La Marque and the bay area can do nothing but come home and wait. "These agencies just have to clean up their act," said Mayor Crowder. "They are simply not enforcing their laws. And when all is said and done, we don't have five million dollars to clean it up either. If they don't come up with the money, it will stay where it is."

Unfortunately, the pollutants won't stay where they are. The contaminants will continue to seep into the ground to the bay and, without action, make their way into the marine life of the region. The chemical drums may vanish into the trucks of vandals—if the vandals aren't seriously burned first. And while the vinyl chloride hovers over the immediate area, its effects may be traveling all over La Marque or elsewhere. Inside the bodies of the former trailer park residents, like TACB spokesman says, the damage is already done.





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