

HIGHLANDS CROSBY Star Courier

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P.O.

French Limited, Sikes

Superfund site may be turned to community use



NON-PROFIT POTENTIAL

THESE BUILDINGS AND THE LAND around them may be donated by the FLTG Superfund if a non-profit community organization can show a plan for using them and maintaining them in the future.

Schools, Chambers express interest

By BOBBY HORN JR.
Star-Courier staff

CROSBY-- French Limited, the company responsible for the cleanup of the Sikes Superfund cleanup on Gulf Pump Road, met with community leaders from Crosby and Barrett Station recently to discuss the future of the facility and property surrounding it after the cleanup is completed.

Dick Sloane, of French Limited, told the group that his company was prepared to donate the facilities at the site after it closes next year. The facilities, valued at \$400,000, include labs, office space and electrical equipment.

The one condition of the donation was that a local entity, that has the funds to pay the maintenance and up keep of the

facility take it over. Sloane said that utilities costs should average \$300 to \$500 a month for part time use.

Since the facility is in a flood plain, state and local regulations prevent it from being used for residential or commercial use.

During the meeting, School Trustee Joanne Crawford said that some of the science teachers in the district have expressed interest in the area and that she would bring up the option to other board members. She also added that some of the area colleges have expressed an interest in a cooperative learning program through their respective science departments, but would not elaborate on which colleges might be interested, saying that their interest was based on speculation of different possible scenarios.

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Superfund

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Al Goodlow, president of the Barrett Station Chamber of Commerce, said that their community's new Youth Enrichment Program could also benefit from the facilities, but would not elaborate on how they would pay for the facility's upkeep. Goodlow did say, however, that he is investigating several different options to raise the necessary funds.

Crosby-Huffman Chamber of Commerce President Mike Foster agreed that the community could get some use from the facility. "It would be a shame to knock down a 5,000 square foot building if it could be used," he said.

When questioned about the safety of the area in regards to toxins in the water, air and soil, Sloane said that the land would not be given over until the groundwater is considered safe by government standards.

He also added that French Limited was required by law to monitor the area for 30 years after completion of the cleanup to ensure that there is no future problems.

11/6/95
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10/24/95

Site along the San Jacinto saved from watery disaster

By BOB SABLATURA
Houston Chronicle

IT took more than \$90 million to accomplish, but many people believe Superfund defused a time bomb on the San Jacinto River.

Before undergoing the nation's largest EPA-led Superfund cleanup, the Sikes Disposal Pits held a lethal cache of pollutants that included more than 500,000 tons of chemical wastes.

Beginning in 1961, the owner of the property started charging haulers as little as \$2 a truckload to dump the wastes in a series of abandoned sand and gravel pits within a stone's throw of the river.

Not only was the site located on sandy soil next to the river, it also sat in the middle of the 100-year flood plain.

"We were afraid that a big flood would come along and wash the contents of those pits into the San Jacinto River and then downstream into the Galveston Bay area," said EPA spokesman David Bary.

Since the bay is a primary source of seafood for the area, the consequences could have been severe, he said.

"That would have had not only environmental impact, but economic impact as well," Bary said.

Since the property's owner did not have the financial ability to remove the contamination, EPA paid for

cleanup operations out of the Superfund coffers.

During the just-completed three-year cleanup phase, a portable incinerator was set up to burn more than 1 billion pounds of abandoned wastes. In addition, 350 million gallons of water also were treated.

The company conducting the successful incineration operation was the same firm that just months earlier had pulled out of a similar operation at the Motco site in Galveston County.

Following the closure of Sikes in 1967, the haulers began dumping their toxic payload at an alternate site across the road.

That site is now the French Limited Superfund site, which carried a price tag almost identical to the Sikes cleanup. This time, however, the \$90 million cleanup costs were shouldered by a coalition of 85 companies that had disposed of wastes at the site.

Also like its sister site, French Limited's toxic wastes were dumped in abandoned gravel pits and the site sat in the river bottom of the San Jacinto, smack in the middle of the flood plain.

While most Superfund sites are viewed largely as community problems, sites such as Sikes and French Limited illustrate the greater danger posed by some toxic waste dumps.

Theresa Lamson, executive director of the Crosby-Huffman Chamber of Commerce, said the cleanup of

the two sites was necessary to protect the river, a major recreational draw for the area.

"The San Jacinto River gives us a tourist attraction, someplace you can go boating and swimming and jet skiing," she said. "If it became polluted, naturally no one would want to go near it."

Businessman Chris Armstrong illustrates another benefit of the cleanup operations. In addition to owning an office supply business in Crosby, he works full time at the French Limited site in plant operations, one of many local residents to gain work at the two sites.

Overall, the community was very accepting of the Superfund cleanups, he said.

"We never had a problem with pickets or protesters at the sites," Armstrong said. "There was a very positive attitude within the community."

Dick Sloan, the project manager of the French Limited site, said the potential danger posed by his site made it clear from the beginning it would need a full-scale cleanup.

But while containment of the toxic wastes was never really an option at French Limited, Sloan said, it often works well as part of an overall cleanup plan and should not be ruled out as an option at other sites.

"You have to look at the potential health risks at each site as a unique situation," Sloan said. "And then you have to work out a timely, cost-effective approach."



Some Superfund sites pose much greater health risks than others. The Sikes Disposal Pits, holding more than 500,000 tons of toxic waste, not only sit on the banks of the San Jacinto River, but

are in a 100-year flood plain. A flood could have caused enormous environmental and economic problems. In this 1992 photo, a mobile incinerator conducts a test burn of chemical sludges.