Physician team to monitor health at Livingston facility

BY ALICE DOWTY
THE NEWS

LIVINGSTON — A team of physicians will soon arrive here to monitor the health effects of Combustion Inc. on plaintiffs. The money for the operation comes from $1.5 million of the massive class action settlement.

The doctors will give the Intergovernemtnal Commission which manages the Livingston Community Medical Center an annual report on their findings. State health officials will also be notified if the physical exams collectively show a significant deviation from normal in terms of disease or mortality rates.

The physicians coming to Livingston will include Dr. Edward Jeffries, Dr. Trenton James, Dr. Alan Hanley, Dr. Jeffrey Donohue, Dr. David Carver, Dr. Robert St. Amant, Dr. Anne Robinson and Dr. Louis Minsky. These eight primary care physicians are affiliated with the Baton Rouge General Medical Center and the Baton Rouge General Health Center.

The Combustion site included waste oil in unlined pits and tanks and buried drums with other chemical contents. It was cleaned up between November 1992 and September 1993 at a cost to defendants in the case of about $15 million, according to court records.

Judge Richard Haik approved the last settlement in the Combustion class action in December 1997-$3.5 million from Chevron and Cooper Gilder Chemical, bringing the total settlement amount to over $130 million. Haik has not yet ruled on how the final $3.5 million will be disbursed. Additional funds might also be left over.

The Chevron settlement came after most plaintiffs had already received a portion of the previous settlements. Plaintiffs in the Combustion class action began picking up settlement checks ranging from $250 to $805,148 in November 1997. About $58 million of the Combustion money was disbursed to about 10,000 plaintiffs and about $70 million was being divided among the state, the plaintiffs' attorneys, and various funds and reserves, according to special master Patrick Juneau, court-appointed architect of the disbursement plan.

Funds and reserves included a $1 million liability fund set aside for the Plaintiffs' Steering Committee, 10 attorneys who conducted most of the settlement negotiations and courtroom work. A $2 million indemnity fund was also set aside for defendants until all litigation was complete and for 13 months after that. After the 13-month waiting period, the $2 million, if not used, "will be disbursed at the court's discretion for the benefit of the class," according to a court document.

About $62 million (48 percent of the total) was set aside to pay the plaintiffs' attorneys' fees and costs. Fees took about 36 percent of the settlement; litigation costs took about 6 percent and administrative costs took another 6 percent, according to court documents.

More than 2,300 defendants and third party-defendants were involved in the case and about 530 attorneys filed and argued motions, according to court records.

Denham gets clean bill in audit

BY KELA CHIASSON
THE NEWS

Denham Springs received a "clean opinion" during its most recent financial audit for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1998.

"As past years, we have a clean [illegible]nion. There were no

DENHAM SPRINGS FISCAL YEAR 1998

GENERAL FUND REVENUES

Taxes	$4,166,264
Licenses & permits	$543,224
Fines & forfeits	$191,915
911 service fees	$165,314
Miscellaneous	$537,735
Total	**$5,604,452**

GENERAL FUND EXPENDITURES

ROAD WORK: *Reflectors going down now on finished roads*

FROM PAGE A1

Doyle Road is complete. The remaining roads in phase one are Forrest Delatte,1 mile; Wax, 1.86 miles; Clinton Allen, 1.85 miles and Caraway, 1.6 miles.

Parish President Dewey Ratcliff said reflectors are being put down on the finished roads now.

The total 1998 contract price is $5,405,589. The estimate[illegible] ost of the 1999 contract is $6, [illegible],232, about $1.5 million more than the 1998 program.

The 1999 program includes work on 52 streets, many in subdivisions, but has 2.49 fewer total miles than the 1998 program, which had only 25 roads.

Out of the 52 roads on the 1999 list, only 16 roads are at least 1 mile long. Only 5 roads on the list are over 3 miles long-Pea Ridge Road (5.35 miles); Brown Road (4.08 miles); Miller Road (3.5 miles); Lod Stafford Road (3.1 miles) and Palmer Road (3.1 miles).

The 1-cent parishwide sales tax paying for the road work is expected to generate about $30 million over 5 years. The first 12 months of sales taxes for road improvements brought in about $5,743,000, a monthly average of about $478,600.

The roads on the 1999 list were taken from the complete 5-year list which has about 435 roads covering about 285 miles. The total parish road count is about 1,575 covering abou[illegible] 575 miles, not including stat[illegible] municipal roads.

The sales tax for the parish overlay program is also collected in municipalities and some municipal road work has been included in the parish capital outlay budget.

The 1998 road contractor, Coastal Bridge Company, Inc., subcontracted with Barber Brothers to supply the asphalt for roads in the northern half of the parish, since Barber Brothers' asphalt plant is closer to the northern Livingston Parish than Coastal's source, Ratcliff said.

Hazardous waste site fire being investigated as arson

By CHRIS FRINK
Florida Parishes bureau

WALKER — A fire at a hazardous waste site near here that briefly chased 100 people from their homes Wednesday and sent nine people to a Baton Rouge emergency room is being investigated as arson.

"There isn't any way combustion could have occurred without outside help," said Sgt. Dale Hall of the Louisiana State Police Hazardous Materials and Transportation unit.

Investigators found signs that someone had scaled the chain-link fence that surrounds the site, he said.

Wednesday night's fire was quickly smothered by volunteers from Fire Protection District 4. The evacuation lasted an hour and the nine taken to the hospital were treated for respiratory problems and released.

Officials from the state police, Department of Environmental Quality and the state Fire Marshal's office inspected the fire site Thursday morning at Combustion Inc., an abandoned complex of 14 waste oil pits, Hall said.

The fire was confined to half of a 100-foot by 225-foot waste oil pit with four inches to a foot of sludge floating on top of an unknown depth of water, he said. "The samples we took were like molasses."

"We took samples to get first-hand data on what was burning," said Tim Knight of DEQ's Inactive and Abandoned Sites Division. "We asked (the lab) for quick turn-around time . . . about 2 to 4 weeks."

"We're also running some ignitability tests to see at what temperatures the sludge will burn," he said.

Hall said officials have results of 3-year-old tests on the waste-oil sludge in "Pit H," the pit that burned. "There are some transformer oils, so there are some PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls, a carcinogen) in that pit," he said.

"The levels (of PCBs) were not that high three years ago" and probably have decreased, Hall said.

Hall said only four of the 14 pits at Combustion have visible oil on the surface — finding one on a dark night would not have been easy. "For somebody to find a pit with oil . . . they knew what they were looking for."

Any volatile — or easy-to-ignite — chemicals have long ago evaporated out of the pits, he said. Anyone who started the fire must have really wanted to do it, Hall said.

Hall said investigators found fresh mud high up on one of the site's gates and a scorched spot in the grass not far from the pit that burned.

Two more arrested in waste case

By CHRIS FRINK
Florida Parishes bureau

GREENSBURG — State police arrested two more men Thursday — including the man they allege ran an illegal hazardous waste storage operation — in the continuing investigation into three waste dumps in St. Helena and Tangipahoa parishes.

Investigators expect to make two more arrests soon, said state police Lt. Kenny Williams. The first suspect arrested also was rebooked on four new counts, he said.

Police had been seeking Bill Crawford, the head of a waste-hauling company, for almost two weeks in connection with two hazardous waste sites reported earlier this month in St. Helena Parish. A third site, a warehouse just outside of Amite, was discovered Monday.

Crawford, 49, of 4802 Tartan Drive in Baton Rouge, was arrested Thursday and booked into the St. Helena Parish jail here on one count each of reckless handling of hazardous materials, illegal disposal of hazardous waste and criminal conspiracy. He was booked earlier Thursday on identical counts in Tangipahoa Parish.

Crawford was released on $50,000 bail set by 21st Judicial District Judge Bruce Bennett soon after being booked in Greensburg. The bail also covered the Tangipahoa counts.

Robert "Butch" Newell, a St. Helena Parish truck driver who state police say worked for Crawford's Southern Environmental Services

Advocate staff photo by John Ross

Southern Environmental Services Inc. owner Bill Crawford is escorted from the Tangipahoa Parish Courthouse in Amite by state police officers Thursday.

illegal handling of hazardous materials and criminal conspiracy, Williams said. He was also booked on the same three counts in Tangipahoa Parish.

Police on Thursday also booked Donald Doughty, 35, of Rt. 4, Hillsdale, for illegal storage and disposal of hazardous waste. He was a laborer working for Crawford, Williams alleged. Doughty was released on his own recognizance.

Crawford was arrested at the

Crawford maintained his innocence on the way into the Sheriff's Office. "I have done nothing wrong," he said. "We have no hazardous waste and never have."

Crawford had said in a telephone interview on Monday that he met with two state Department of Environmental Quality officials Dec. 31 about his operation, which he said is recycling and not disposal. He said he was told it was legal and would not be

found at the site included laboratory waste, experimental pesticides, drums of waste from an asbestos abatement project and hospital waste.

One family was evacuated from near one of the sites and other residents who live near the two St. Helena sites said they had experienced medical problems since the materials appeared.

"We acquire chemicals and resell chemicals," he said. "It's a reuse program

Jury indicts police chief for extortion

By JOE GYAN JR.
New Orleans bureau

NEW ORLEANS — A federal grand jury indicted Napoleonville Police Chief Lawrence "Sam" Williams on one count of extortion Thursday for allegedly promising to influence a Napoleonville man's sentence if the man paid Williams $10,000.

The grand jury accused Williams, 60, of attempting to "obtain payments of money that were not due him or his office and to which neither he nor his office was entitled" by "wrongful use of fear of economic loss" and "threatened violence."

First Assistant U.S. Attorney Al Winters Jr. said the police chief will be arraigned late next week in New Orleans by U.S. Magistrate Michaelle Wynne.

Napoleonville lawyer Marty Triche, who — along with his father, Risley "Pappy" Triche — is representing Williams, declined to comment on the indictment.

Williams, a former mayor of Napoleonville, was the city's first black mayor.

Williams was arrested Jan. 23 by FBI agents after they allegedly videotaped him receiving a partial payment of $5,000 from Louis Joseph Comeaux Jr. of Napoleonville, who was acting as an intermediary between the police chief and Donald Bourg of Napoleonville. Winters told U.S.

an aggravated battery charge if Bourg paid him (Williams) $10,000, according to an FBI affidavit.

An Assumption Parish grand jury indicted Bourg on the battery charge following a confrontation April 5 with Williams that left the police chief, Bourg and Bourg's brother with bullet wounds. Bourg's trial has been postponed until completion of the federal case.

Williams, who responded to a "burglary in progress" at Bourg's residence, mistook Bourg and his brother for burglars and fired several shots, injuring the Bourg brothers, the FBI affidavit stated. Bourg, believing he was being fired at by a burglar, returned fire, striking Williams in the leg, the affidavit added.

The alleged extortion scheme indirectly stemmed from Bourg's purchase of a mechanics shop from Comeaux for $25,000 — a $5,000 down payment and a $20,000 promissory note. Bourg was formerly employed by Comeaux.

Williams first talked to Comeaux on Dec. 26 about the possibility of Bourg going to jail and said he didn't want Comeaux to "get burned," according to the FBI affidavit. Williams allegedly told Comeaux to tell Bourg that he (Williams) could see to it that Bourg received a suspended jail sentence if Bourg paid Williams $10,000, the affidavit stated.