

The Daily Advertiser

130th YEAR, No. 222

LAFAYETTE, LA., THURSDAY, MAY 2, 1996

PHONE 289-6300

50¢

No. 237

The Daily Advertiser

LAFAYETTE, LA., FRIDAY, MAY 17, 1996

EPA works toxic site

By Bruce Murray
Vermilion Bureau writer

ABBEVILLE — A cache of bulging barrels filled with toxic chemicals has been located at another John Broussard-operated storage site in Abbeville.

Tuesday and Wednesday, both the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Louisiana State Police were at the scene on 230 S. Main St.

Robert Sullivan, EPA emergency response coordinator, said there are about 120 barrels of toxic substances, previously undetected, in the back warehouse of a building known as the "ceramic shop."

The recent discovery is in addition to the other 60 drums outside the warehouse. All are part of a \$1.2-million EPA cleanup that encompasses sites — most of them associated with former Broussard Chemical owner John Broussard — on both sides of the Vermilion River.

Based on initial analysis of the recent discovery, Sullivan said the drums contain a myriad substances that range from highly acidic to highly base in nature.

"If you mix them, they go boom," he said.

The potential for mixture — and consequent disaster — at the site was high, Sullivan said.

"The drums are bulging, venting and leaking," he said. "This poses an imminent and substantive endangerment to public health."

As well as the acids and bases, Sullivan said he also suspects the drums contain polystyrene, a highly toxic substance used in the making of plastics.

"Forget about the mutagenic effects (of polystyrene). It can kill you," Sullivan said.

A representative from the State Police Transportation and Environmental Section said his agency was notified Monday of the 120-drum cache.

"The drums were bulging and

expanding and could have potentially exploded," the State Police representative said. "We declared it a hazardous materials incident — similar to if an 18-wheeler going down the road overturned."

The building where the drums are stored is owned by Broussard, and the property is owned by the trustee of his bankrupt company. While the drums are in the back warehouse, a company called Environmental Blue leases and operates in the front portion of the building from Broussard.

Employees at Environmental Blue notified State Police and EPA officials about the drums, according to Sullivan.

Tuesday, Broussard was called to the site to identify the chemicals in the drums.

"He could not produce the records of what was in them," Sullivan said. "We gave him the opportunity to clean them up immediately, and he deferred it to the EPA."

Sullivan said the EPA's legal division will initiate the cost recovery process after the cleanup is complete.

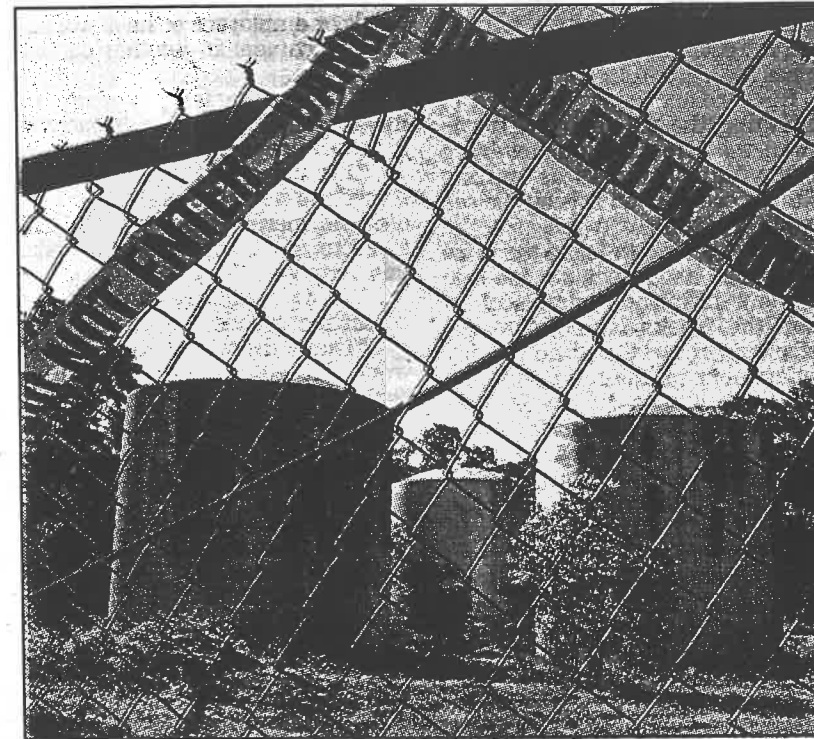
The State Police representative said no charges have been filed as of yet. "We are going to have to await analysis of what kinds of chemicals we are dealing with to see what kind of charges would be filed," he said.

Outside of the warehouse on South Main, there are 16 above-ground storage tanks containing waste oil, glycol and other chemicals that the EPA is preparing for proper disposal.

Across the river on South Henry Street, there are nine above-ground tanks that are being dealt with, along with about 300 drums in the old Broussard Chemical warehouse.

There is also a "drum graveyard" in the woods next to the warehouse.

In total, the cleanup involves 25 large tanks and 650 drums.



THE ADVERTISER/Arthur D. Lauck

A red tape warning of danger frames three storage tanks on the South Henry Street site in Abbeville. State Police and Environmental Protection Agency officials have been at the site this week.

Toxics search focuses on Vermilion field

By Bruce Murray
Vermilion Bureau writer

ABBEVILLE — An unmarked graveyard of storage drums was unearthed Thursday afternoon underneath a grazing field owned by John W. Broussard.

A task force composed of both federal and state officials executed the search warrant on the rural property south of Abbeville. It is the second search warrant to be imposed on Broussard in the past two weeks.

Heavy earth-moving equipment exposed the shallowly buried drums that lay immediately below the freshly grazed field. Cattle from surrounding fields grazed on, uninterested.

Agencies participating in the search included the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Criminal Investigation Division,



THE ADVERTISER/Bruce Murray

State and federal officials excavate barrels from a pasture owned by John W. Broussard. The contents of the barrels are unknown. Thursday's search is the second to be conducted on Broussard's property in the past two weeks.

the state Department of Environmental Quality and State Police.

Ivan Vikin, a special agent with the EPA Criminal Division, said his agency gained knowledge of the graveyard during the course of its ongoing investigation of Broussard and his operations.

After the site is excavated, the barrels will be hauled away and their contents analyzed, Vikin said.

Workers were still digging late Thursday afternoon, and the number of drums, as well as their contents, remains undetermined.

The property is located on Peach Road, a dirt road south of South Henry Street.

Broussard, who was present at the scene, said, "I'm cooperating. I'm working to get this job done for the community, and that's all I can say."

Findings from the investigations are being handed over to the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Howard Parker said any possible charges against Broussard will depend on the outcomes of the investigations and the decision of a federal grand jury.

"The criminal investigation awaits review of voluminous records and the results of tests of chemicals at Antifreeze Inc. and the ceramic shop location," Parker said.

"If criminal charges flow, a grand jury will consider it."

Parker stressed that all priority is being given to ensure the safety of local residents.

"The criminal matter is moving at deliberate speed, and the cleanup is moving at breakneck speed. They are doing the utmost they can," Parker said.