



MEDIA RELEASE

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LDEQ REFUSES TEMPORARY LANDFILL CLOSURE

NEW ORLEANS – Attempts to broker a compromise over testing of waste dumped into the Chef Menteur landfill were quashed when city and state government officials refused to shut down the landfill pending an agreement on testing protocol and results.

“We asked Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality to shut down the landfill for 30 days while we discussed testing protocol and results,” says Father Vien, priest of Queen Mary of Vietnam Church and community leader. “They refused to consider this option, despite the low volumes of debris that could easily be taken elsewhere. Thus, we conclude that they are not serious, that this is the same song, just sung on a different day. No matter what we said, the answer was no.”

The lack of compromise was a major disappointment to groups that attended a one-day meeting on Thursday, June 29, at Mary Queen of Vietnam Church in New Orleans East. The meeting was attended by representatives of Citizens for a Strong New Orleans East, the Louisiana Environmental Action Network, the New Orleans East Business Association, the Eastover Homeowners Association, Mary Queen of Vietnam Church, National Alliance of Vietnamese American Service Agencies, the Southern Christian Leadership Council, the Sierra Club, and Councilwoman Cynthia Willard-Lewis. They faced off against representatives from the Louisiana Department of

Environmental Quality, the City of New Orleans, and Waste Management Inc. The discussion was observed by representatives of FEMA.

LDEQ suggested the meeting as a way to work together to pick new experts and again agree on a protocol to test the landfill. While the community did agree to broaden the scope of the examination to include economic and social impacts, the community representatives refused to re-engage in the process unless steps were taken to assure the community was not wasting time while the landfill was filled.

“DEQ is just trying to run the clock. We withdrew from previous talks because LDEQ, the city and Waste Management would not agree to meaningful testing.” says Joel Waltzer, attorney for Louisiana Environmental Action Network, “They offer us and the community bunk science, intentionally misleading the public to unbiased testing but want to continue to dump.

The community also proposed to further testing with the caveat that the results of the testing be brought in front of the City Council for an up or down vote. LDEQ was unwilling to commit to giving a publicly elected body the right to make the ultimate decision. The Mayor’s Office and the New Orleans City Council are being approached to take that role.

Another meeting will occur July 6th to discuss experts and the scope of the testing.

“Our greatest concern is that LDEQ’s Chuck Brown stated the demolition debris will be picked up in the next five months,” says Leslie March, chair of the Delta (Louisiana) Chapter of the Sierra Club. “This is the debris of greatest concern to the community and environmental groups. The community is concerned this process will run for months while the city continues to dump. This could make the testing meaningless.”

The Chef Menteur landfill is located .8 miles from the first community to begin recovery in New Orleans East after Hurricane Katrina. Further progress is impeded by the presence of the landfill, say community leaders. “Why would people want to bring our vulnerable family members, such as the elderly and children, back into a potentially unhealthy environment,” says Father Vien.

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The Sierra Club's 750,000 members work together to protect communities and the planet. The Club is America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The Delta (Louisiana) chapter of the Sierra Club has more than 3,500 members and has been active in local conservation projects for more than 30 years. For more information, contact the organization's website: www.louisiana.sierraclub.org.