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DEQ-CID arrests an Iberville Parish man for the alleged illegal dumping of pollutants

BATON ROUGE – Today, investigators within the Criminal Investigation Division of the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality arrested an Iberville Parish man for the alleged illegal dumping of pollutants into state waterways.

Tommy M. Francise, 54, of Plaquemine, is alleged to have intentionally dumped waste glycerin into state waterways during the production of biodiesel at his residence.

Investigators with the Iberville Parish Sheriff's Office and DEQ's Criminal Investigations Division observed an area at the rear of Francise's residence where used cooking oil was being used for the production of biodiesel. Household garbage, wood, cans, plastic, metal, glass, pipe, nails and concrete were also found around the residence. DEQ-CID assisted with the search warrant, due to the possibility of an illegal discharge of pollutants into waterways of the State of Louisiana.

A large area of soil contamination from grease was present at the site, including two locations where used cooking oil was being discharged into the canal from the biodiesel production site. Hoses were found connected to biodiesel container locations in a manner that was indicative of an intentional illegal discharge into Louisiana's waterways. Vegetation at the site was destroyed and a canal behind the residence was found to have been contaminated with grease approximately 10 yards upstream and 100 yards downstream. Further inspection at the site revealed a large pile of burned solid waste approximately 20 feet from the processing area, which also contained several 55 gallon drums of Methanol.

A Petition for Injunctive Relief was also filed against Francise in order to halt the unauthorized discharges of pollutants to waters of the state and to discontinue the storage of oil and liquids at his residence. The Injunction includes a request for an excavation of all areas of visibly contaminated soils, and to properly characterize and dispose of all contaminated soils in accordance with the Louisiana Solid Waste and Hazardous Waste Regulations. Additionally, soil samples in all excavated areas are to be analyzed for methanol and pH by a DEQ-certified laboratory.

"The illegal dumping of pollutants into the state's waterways in any form or manner will not be tolerated," said Keith Bates, Criminal Investigator with DEQ-CID. "We will continue to aggressively pursue anyone found to be willfully allowing or engaging in illegal disposals and discharges."

One of the violations cited in the arrest warrant is a felony. If convicted of the crime of knowingly discharging pollutants to waters of the state, Francise faces possible imprisonment for not more than three years with or without hard labor, or a fine of not more than \$50,000, or both.

An arrest does not constitute guilt in a criminal case. All evidence compiled during the investigation is presented to the area prosecutors who determine if formal charges are warranted.