



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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DEQ FOCUSES ON DISPOSAL OF 22 MILLION TONS OF DEBRIS FROM KATRINA AND RITA

BATON ROUGE, La. – A daunting task that is prevalent throughout the coastal parishes concerns what to do with the more than 22 million tons of debris brought about by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The Department of Environmental Quality has been working closely with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and other state, local and federal officials to dispose of the large amounts, and many types of waste.

The debris has to be separated into proper categories before it can be disposed of in an environmentally sound manner. For example, white goods such as air conditioners and refrigerators must have the Freon, fluids and/or contents removed before they can be recycled. Municipal waste, such as food and curbside trash, goes to a certain landfill, construction and demolition debris goes to another type of landfill and hazardous material goes to yet another type of landfill.

“What we are trying to do is dispose of the overwhelming amount of debris in an environmentally sound and efficient manner,” said DEQ Assistant Secretary of Environmental Services Chuck Brown.

Brown explained that properly closed landfills could be reopened if they are technically sound and meet all the environmental regulations for permit approval. He also said that, because of time and environmental reasons, location is important in deciding which landfill receives the waste it is permitted to receive.

“Take the Old Gentilly Landfill for instance,” Brown said. “It’s located in Orleans Parish. It was granted a permit in December 2004. It is permitted to take construction and demolition debris. There is so much debris in New Orleans east after Katrina that it just makes sense to have permitted landfills operating, taking in as much C&D waste as they are permitted to take. Close proximity to the impacted area is important to help speed up the clean-up process.”

Brown said the issue is not about capacity at any particular landfill. The real issue is about processing capability.

“When the trucks come in to the landfill, they have to be properly processed before leaving the waste,” Brown said. “You don’t want trucks hauling tons of debris on the roads then having them backed up for four or five hours to unload their haul. That’s inefficient and environmentally unsound.”

Much of the wood waste from trees will be burned using air curtain destructors. These devices have been successful in other instances where a large amount of debris had to be disposed of. Because it burns at high temperatures, using sophisticated technology, the amount of smoke is reduced and the burn is more complete – leaving little ash.

EPA announced earlier this week that it and its partners have collected more than 1 million pounds of household hazardous waste. These materials have to be disposed of in a proper manner and can not be put into a C&D or municipal landfill.