



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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DEQ to take additional samples in Assumption Parish

BATON ROUGE – Scientists from the Department of Environmental Quality will be in and around a slurry hole near Bayou Corne in Assumption Parish today to sample for naturally occurring radioactive material (NORM). Because the location of the slurry hole is in the proximity of areas that had been previously used for oil and gas exploration, there is the possibility for low levels of NORM to be present. The location of the sampling is remote and not in a populated area. However, out of an abundance of caution, and to gather more information, DEQ Secretary Peggy Hatch is requiring certified scientists to develop and execute a sampling plan that includes soil and water samples for NORM to verify there are no health risks.

In a separate effort to ensure public safety, Hatch has instructed air quality scientists to develop and execute an air sampling plan for the department's Mobile Air Monitoring Laboratory, also known as the MAML. The MAML will be used strictly to test air quality for possible air pollutants near residences. The MAML is not used to monitor NORM. It will be used to test for air pollutants related to diesel and other oil and gas exploration materials.

The department has been supporting Assumption Parish personnel with continuous air monitoring since July 13. Before that, DEQ supported DNR by using the infrared Hawk camera to test abandoned wells for leaks. DEQ scientists have also sampled more than 95 private properties for possible air pollution. None of the samples showed any health threats related to air pollution.

"The staff at DEQ is committed to the protection of human health and the environment," Hatch said. "We have taken water and air samples regularly in support of Assumption Parish and our sister agencies involved in an effort to ensure the air and water quality is safe. Out of abundance of caution and because of the ongoing incident, I have decided to further enhance our monitoring efforts."

Anyone working on the slurry hole site must follow regulations by wearing protective gear because of possible long-term exposure to diesel fumes.

DEQ is continually monitoring the situation and will release any new information as it is obtained.