

# Screen signs anti-PCB law; court fight likely

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Mayor Screen signed an anti-PCB ordinance into law Wednesday afternoon while officials of the company that wants to burn the toxic chemical here met with Chamber of Commerce officials.

Wednesday morning, a Rollins official said the company likely will take the city-parish to court over the new law.

During a press conference to mark the signing, Screen and Metro Councilman Melvin "Kip" Holden, the sponsor of the ordinance, said they don't think the fight to stop Rollins Environmental Services Inc. from burning PCBs in Alsen is over yet.

Although Rollins announced Monday

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that it would withdraw its application for a permit to conduct a test burn of polychlorinated biphenyls (a class of chemicals known as PCBs), Screen said:

"I cynically view the events of the last few days. I doubt that they've pulled in their horns. I think it's a time-out."

Later in the day, Chamber President Bill Little refused to discuss the details of a lengthy discussion among Chamber and Rollins Environmental Services Inc. officials.

"We had a very frank and open

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# PCB

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discussion," Little said.

Representatives from Rollins' home office in Wilmington, Del., and from the local waste disposal site just north of the city attended the afternoon session.

Chamber officials have opposed Rollins' request to burn PCBs here, but Little also tried Tuesday to get the council to postpone action on an ordinance that specifically prohibits the handling, treatment and disposal of PCBs at commercial waste disposal operations in the parish.

After the council unanimously passed the ordinance, Little said he felt the law would be unenforceable and would place a hardship on companies that handle materials containing PCBs, such as Gulf States Utilities' transformer replacement crews and air conditioning repair shops.

Holden said the council can amend the law to accommodate specific situations.

But Rollins spokesman Tom Blank said the firm probably will fight the law.

"The council's action is not an appropriate one from a legal point of view," Blank said. "Because of their significance to the nation as a whole, the

authority over certain issues rests with the federal government. We think that is the case with the disposal of PCBs."

The firm is seeking to burn up to 2,500 pounds of PCBs per hour at its Scenic Highway waste-disposal facility. On Monday, Rollins withdrew its application for a test burn, at least temporarily, until a committee being formed by Gov. Edwards can make further studies of the PCB issue.

In signing the ordinance into law, the mayor said he and the council were sending out "a strong signal" that "the time has come to be concerned about the environment."

"We are not going to turn our backs on the problem, not going to turn our backs on the issue. We are going to continue to push for the 'right to know,'" the mayor said, referring to a proposal that would require businesses to reveal to the public what chemicals they handle and manufacture.

Holden said he expected Rollins to "follow the same path with us that they did in New Jersey," where a similar anti-PCB law was challenged in the courts.

"Once they think we are asleep, they will come back and try the same approach," Holden said of his fears for the future.

The mayor said that individuals from the chemical industry came to him and asked him to back off on the PCB fight. He said he refused and the group went off to "negotiate" with others.

He was asked if the "others" referred to Gov. Edwards, and Screen said he did not mean that to indicate the governor. He said he thought the governor was backing the city-parish's fight against PCBs through Pat Norton, Edwards' secretary for environmental quality.

Edwards did announce that Rollins was pulling its application and that he would form a task force to look into the matter.

"I deeply appreciate whatever role the governor played in getting Rollins to back off. . . . But you don't change your spots overnight," the mayor said, referring to Rollins.

Screen said he did not think the governor's task force or any other group could change his mind.

"Whatever the task force says. . . is not going to change the fact that that facility is in the middle of a highly urbanized area," Screen said.

Councilman Ben Peabody said that the PCB incineration issue has sparked more calls than just about any other topic the council has faced in the past four years.