

## Unit 3: Power



### **Excerpt from *Environmental Concerns – and Anger – Grow in Month After Thousand-Year Flood Strikes Louisiana***

In the aftermath of the 1000-year flood that hit southern Louisiana in August, environmental and public health concerns are mounting as the waters recede. Residents want to know why many areas that never flooded before were left in ruin this time, raising questions about the role water management played in potentially exacerbating the flood. The smell of mold lingers on streets where the contents from flooded homes and businesses are stacked in piles along the curbside, as well as in neighborhoods next to landfills where storm debris is taken. ...

DRC Emergency Services, the contractor charged with removing debris in Baton Rouge, expects it could take until the end of October to complete. The company has quadrupled its estimate of flood debris to 1.3 million cubic yards, according to the Baton Rouge Advocate.

When it comes to debris removal, we are doing the same stuff wrong we did after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Subra told me. “We are still not providing the workers with the proper protection,” she said. “Respirators are needed to protect them from particulates.”

After Katrina, officials were supposed to develop contingency plans to direct the disposal of hurricane debris, so it wouldn’t end up next to residential areas again. But that is exactly what is happening: After August’s flood, LDEQ permitted a temporary landfill next to Monticello — a predominantly African-American neighborhood in east Baton Rouge, where Katrina debris was dumped 11 years earlier.

The Ronaldson Field landfill in Alsen, another African-American neighborhood just north of Baton Rouge has also been permitted to take storm debris following the storm, much to the frustration of its residents. Alsen residents have been against the private landfill since it started operations over 20 years ago. People living next to the landfills “should be concerned,” Subra said. “The particulates that you would inhale go deep into the lungs and could contain a whole host of bacteria. Asbestos is a huge issue, and sheetrock that starts to degrade lets off hydrogen sulfide, which endangers your lungs.”

I contacted the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to find out about its role in protecting workers in a flood zone. Juan Rodriguez, responsible for public relations at the OSHA Dallas office, told me it has a team on the ground in Louisiana.

The team “provided information to workers, employers, and the public in general,” Rodriguez wrote in an email,

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though he didn't specify where exactly the team went or what it had done. ...

At a community meeting in Alsen on September 6, residents voiced their concerns about the Ronaldson Field landfill being allowed to receive mold-covered storm debris so close to their homes.

"We have had to deal with the landfill for over 20 years," Moses Evans, Jr. said at the meeting. He and the other Alsen residents expressed outrage that the LDEQ would let the Ronaldson Field landfill take the storm debris. Evans complained that residents had already been subjected to the landfill for much longer than the original seven years the community was told the landfill would be permitted to operate.

"This community is not fit for human beings to live already," Evans said. "And now the air and traffic is even worse."

He thinks the only solution for protecting residents is for them to receive a buy-out and relocate. Many at the meeting shared this sentiment with the panel of invited guests that included Mark Stafford, the vice president of DRC Emergency Services; Sid Brian, owner of Ronaldson Field landfill; Chuck Carr Brown, secretary of the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality; and William Patrick, Sr., public works operations manager for the city-parish.

Brown tried to assure the community that LDEQ is making sure no hazardous materials make it to the landfill, which is was only permitted to take construction and demolition waste. "The only thing different for this particular emergency is that now the landfill can take furniture and carpet, too," he said.

Brown acknowledged that he couldn't guarantee that 100 percent of hazardous waste and other items aren't getting dumped at Ronaldson Field and reminded people that LDEQ sent out an advisory telling people to sort out hazardous waste when clearing out their homes.

The panelists insisted they were being diligent in making sure whatever household hazardous waste not separated out on curbs is pulled by workers hired as spotters. Such declarations were met with groans and laughter from the audience. People pointed out that isn't what they are seeing when they drive around Baton Rouge.

### Works Cited

Dermansky, J. (2016, September 17). Environmental Concerns - and Anger - Grow in Month After Thousand-Year Flood Strikes Louisiana. Retrieved from DeSmog: <https://www.desmog.com/2016/09/17/environmental-concerns-and-anger-grow-month-after-thousand-year-flood-strikes-louisiana/>