

Pollution fighters bicker over clean up of Houston Ship Channel

HOUSTON (AP) — State and federal pollution fighters bickered for hours over the wording of new recommendations for cleaning up Galveston Bay and the Houston Ship Channel Tuesday but adjourned the first day of a conference without reaching total agreement.

The debate came at a reconvening of the Galveston Bay Enforcement Conference called by the Environmental Protection Agency. The conference was a continuation of a meeting held last June.

Federal recommendations presented by Richard Vanderhoof of the EPA's Dallas office called for a minimum allowable biological oxygen demand load (a measure of pollution) of 35,000 pounds per day for the Houston Ship Channel. The current amount of BOD is about 100,000.

Hugh Yantis of the Texas Water Quality Board, protested vigorously and called for continuation of the current WQB policies which, he said, have reduced the BOD load in the channel from 400,000 to 100,000.

"If Texas were really hurrying (in its fight against pollution) we would be sympathetic," said Vanderhoof.

Yantis said the 35,000 figure was based on "a good guess" of what it would take to produce a level of two parts per million of dissolved oxygen in the Houston Ship Channel. This level is the bare minimum for the survival of fish.

The state official said the guess could be wrong and instead of setting a firm figure, "I would suggest we go back to what we have done and what we can do."

He said a study of Galveston Bay will be finished in two years and a firm figure could be established then.

"Until the score is in in 1973, what number do you use?" asked Murray Stein, an EPA official in

charge of the conference. "What are we going to get for that 35,000? A miserable two parts per million of dissolved oxygen. That's just scraping above the nuisance level."

Vanderhoof said that by setting a firm figure for the minimum amount of pollution allowable, the agencies would be able then to allocate the amount of discharge permitted each industry along the channel.

"The 1968 state permits were

over allocated by a factor of 10," he said. "Existing permits are over allocated by a factor of three."

Yantis countered that it is possible to get the channel too clean. The channel, he said should be just clean enough to protect Galveston Bay from damage and to make it any cleaner "would be a waste of resources."

"We strongly suspect the bay is already near the breaking point," said Vanderhoof.

Later, Vanderhoof told newsmen that Yantis' stand "must be a pro industry position."

"The Water Quality Board is not doing its job on the Houston Ship Channel," he said. "We're not trying to take the job away from the state. We are trying to encourage the WQB to take up the reins."

Yantis also objected to wording in the recommendation which called for allocating allowable waste discharges for the 15 largest

sources — most of which are industrial — by Feb. 15, 1972, and for the other sources by June 30, 1972.

Vanderhoof said the disagreement would eventually be resolved by the Washington offices of the EPA. He noted that the EPA would have the final say in how much waste discharge is permitted because each of the municipalities and industries must get a permit from the U. S. Corps of Engineers to discharge

into the Ship Channel or the bay. These permits are issued on the basis of EPA recommendations, he said.

The EPA and the WQB also disagreed over allowing the Houston Lighting & Power Co. to discharge cooling water into Trinity Bay, an arm of Galveston Bay. The WQB wants to allow it. The EPA does not. The issue was separated from the general business of the conference, and officials said it will be settled

later at a separate hearing of the power company's federal permit.

The state and federal agencies were able to agree on nine recommendations with only minor changes.

Citizens permitted to talk at the conference heatedly attacked the Texas Water Quality Board State Rep. Rex Braun of Houston called the WQB "a high licensing agency for the industrial polluters."

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Victims of tidal wave now face food shortages

NEW DELHI (AP) — Serious food shortages and widespread water pollution posed a new danger Tuesday night to the coastal areas of eastern Orissa state, already devastated by a tidal wave and cyclonic storm that caused thousands of deaths.

The official death toll, released by the state government and still based only on sketchy reports, mounted to 6,000.

But the Indian government radio expressed fears that as many as 25,000 may have perished. A correspondent for United News of India said after touring the hardest-hit districts that at least 10,000 families — or about 50,000 persons — were feared dead.

Most of the coastal regions still were inaccessible, leaving doubts as to how many of the nearly five million persons who lived in the 5,000-square-mile area had survived.

The 16-foot tidal wave and 100 mile per hour winds struck last Friday night. They left roads filled with fallen trees and the debris of thousands of homes, delaying emergency medical teams.

Witnesses said bodies floated in many of the rivers, polluting the only main water supplies in the area. Once fertile fields were vast graveyards littered with the dead, they said.

Thousands of boats sank or washed out to sea, further hampering rescue efforts.

There were official fears that many survivors would die unless airplanes began immediate food drops in isolated areas that have been cut off from supplies for the last four days. Officials said mass inoculations also should begin at once to prevent a cholera epidemic.

Officials in Orissa confirmed that about 2,500 East Pakistani refugees had died on the offshore Jambu Islands, which bore the initial brunt of the tidal wave. The victims had survived civil strife in their homeland, a cholera outbreak in refugee camps this summer and floods in September.

The tidal wave spread tons of salt water from the Bay of Bengal over the area's rich farmlands, destroying this year's rice crop and ruining chances of any new plantings.

The government radio said units of the armed forces—which have been on alert for the past two weeks in a show of force along the borders with Pakistan — would be sent to Orissa for rescue and relief work.

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