

EPA tests find hazardous compound at Buckeye plant

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Recent tests at the Buckeye Florida plant near Perry have revealed the hazardous chemical compound dioxin.

The findings, revealed Thursday by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, could result in more federal scrutiny of Florida's stalled proposal to pipe waste 17 miles from the plant to the Gulf of Mexico.

Plant officials, who support the pipeline proposal, dispute the EPA's new findings. They say the eliminated dioxin from their waste during the mid-1990s.

The EPA blocked Florida's pipeline proposal in 1998 and began inspecting the plant for ways to reduce pollution. An agency official said Friday the

findings point to the need to reduce pollution.

"The goal would be to possibly eliminate — if not, at the very least, reduce — the size and scope of the pipeline," said Don Anderson of the Engineering and Analysis Division in EPA's Office of Water in Washington, D.C.

A Buckeye Florida spokeswoman, Sondra Dowdell, said the results are scientifically invalid and therefore meaningless.

She said the company would rather focus on restoring the Fen-holloway River beside the plant by building the pipeline and removing the plant's waste from the river.

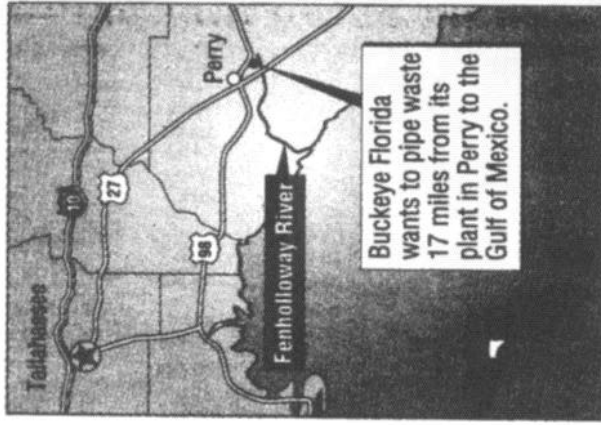
The plant, which has 850 workers, is the largest employer in Taylor County. The plant produces fibers from pine trees that

are used in disposable diapers and other consumer products.

Dioxins are chemical compounds created unintentionally during chlorine bleaching of pulp. In addition to being hazardous at higher levels, dioxins accumulate in humans and animals. They also are suspected of causing reproductive problems in wildlife.

The state proposed the pipeline in 1994 after a study to determine how to improve water quality in the Fenholloway River.

Some environmental groups oppose the pipeline. They say the plant should reduce pollution rather than moving its discharge to the Gulf of Mexico.



JOHN ROBERGE/Democrat

Please see **BUCKEYE, 2B**

SATURDAY
JANUARY 13, 2001

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The pollution has forced residents along the river to abandon their drinking water wells. The dark pollution has shaded and killed about nine square miles of seagrass beds at the mouth of the river in the Gulf.

Company officials say plant improvements will reduce the darkness of the pollution and allow seagrasses to grow again. The pipeline also will reduce pollution caused by salt in the plant's discharge.

Dioxin was detectable only at the level of 10 parts per quadrillion in the past, the EPA's Anderson said. But new test methods now make it possible to detect even smaller amounts, such as

the 2.4 parts per quadrillion found at the Buckeye plant.

Buckeye's Dowdell said the test results are meaningless because EPA's test protocols for dioxin have determined that amounts less than 10 parts per quadrillion are erroneous.

"I don't understand why — upon further review — they want to deviate from their own method," Dowdell said.

Anderson and other EPA officials could not be reached Friday evening to respond to her comments.

The new dioxin findings were revealed in a letter written Thursday to environmental attorney Jessica Landman of Takoma Park, Md. She could not be reached for comment Friday.

A representative of a coalition of environmental groups that has fought the pipeline proposal said the findings should negate the need for a pipeline.

"It is very irresponsible for anyone to allow Buckeye to build a pipeline to the Gulf, where they can just dump this dioxin and other pollution into the Gulf of Mexico where it will continue to accumulate," said Linda Young, southeast regional coordinator for the Clean Water Network.

Buckeye's Dowdell said dioxin was eliminated in about 1994 while the plant was making \$60 million in improvements recommended by the EPA to reduce dioxin.

She said she can't understand why anyone wants to delay the pipeline — and the river restoration — by focusing on dioxin.

"We are focusing on areas that we feel we have real issues," she said. "We feel like we have solved the dioxin issue."

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