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## Response for money from companies 'pretty good

William E. Johnson / Staff Writer  
Posted on June 6, 2002

CANKTON - A final decision on what to do about the Mar Services site off La. 93 near here should be made within the next few weeks.

Money remains the main stumbling block to cleaning up the oil, sludge and contaminated soil that was deposited at the site by more than 300 companies over the past 70 years.

"We've had pretty good response," said Earl Moran, business manager for MARGONE, the company created to handle the cleanup effort.

Moran said MARGONE has collected either money or pledges totaling \$3.3 million of the estimated \$5.3 million needed for the cleanup project.

"Most of the smaller companies have signed on. Many companies want to cooperate," Moran said.

He said the main holdouts now are some of the larger firms that can most easily afford to cooperate. "I'm annoyed. Some of them are as big as big oil," Moran said.

While the pledges in hand total about 62 percent of the funds needed, Moran said MARGONE must receive a minimum commitment of at least 80 percent before it can begin.

That total would allow MARGONE to begin work on the project while it began litigation against the holdouts. "If I have to take them to court, I'm willing to do that."

But if the money is not forthcoming, the deal could be called off. "MARGONE will not accept offers less than the amount due from each company. Funding is now the determining issue as to whether the work will start or not," Moran said.

In April, MARGONE, a company formed by ExxonMobile and UNOCAL, offered a settlement agreement to the 115 companies that used the site.

That agreement requires each company to pay MARGONE a one-time cash payment for the cleanup based on its percentage share of material sent to the site.

In exchange MARGONE has agreed to complete the cleanup and assume any risks associated with the project.

One





The initial deadline for the 115 surviving companies to accept the settlement agreement was June 4, but that deadline has been extended.

"Some companies have contacted us and requested additional response time. Therefore, we will likely not have a complete tally of the funding committed until the end of June," Moran said.

If the funding is inadequate, MARGONE has two options. It can accept the settlement agreements it has received and institute legal action against those companies refusing to participate, or return the project to the state.

"MARGONE has discussed its options with the state agencies if inadequate funding is received, but no decisions have been made," Moran said.

If MARGONE does receive the minimum funding required in the settlement agreement, work on the cleanup project "will begin after a reasonable preconstruction phase."

The actual work on the site will take about 18 months to complete. He said once the work is complete, MARGONE will monitor the site for as much as seven years to ensure the cleanup is effective and the site meets, and continues to meet, all state requirements.

"It continues to be MARGONE'S goal to complete this work in a cost-effective manner to the benefit of the community, the property owners, the involved companies and the State of Louisiana," Moran said.

He said ExxonMobile and UNOCAL are doing this primarily as a public service. "We are doing this because we know how to do it. We took this over because it was the right thing to do." He estimated the two companies only contributed about 2 percent of the waste at the site.

Moran wants to assure the public that the delay, while frustrating, is not a health hazard. "This is not a bad site. It is not radically dangerous in terms of human health and the environment."

He said extensive tests at the site have shown that the main contaminate is sodium chloride, common table salt. "It is not dangerous, but it is hard to deal with it. It is low tech, but very labor intensive."

He said there are also small pockets of zinc, oil and grease and some barium, "but there are no PCBs, no pesticides or arsenic."

He said as far as MARGONE can determine, the contaminants are not spreading out from the site. To monitor the project, the company is maintaining test wells on the site and at homes in a quarter mile radius. "There is nothing in them," Moran said.

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