

AP Laserphoto



Witness Herbert Rigmaiden of Louisiana

## Witnesses cite perils of dumps

WASHINGTON (AP) — Contaminated drinking water has caused health problems for people and livestock, destroyed property values and frightened homeowners, witnesses from Louisiana and two other states told a House subcommittee on Wednesday.

The homeowners told the environment, energy and natural resources subcommittee of the House Government Operations Committee that chemical contamination of water is a problem the nation must solve.

Herbert Rigmaiden of Willow Springs, La., blamed a legal waste dump near his ranch for the contaminated water he said has resulted in health problems for his family and in death for some of his cattle.

Rigmaiden said he has gotten little help from the state in containing the contamination.

"Our government is not worth a plug nickel," he said.

Rigmaiden has led a nine-year fight to shut down the Browning Ferris Industries waste management facility about 3,000 feet from his home.

He displayed snapshots of his farm and his family and spoke off-the-cuff about the time some of his cows drank from a pond and "got, I imagine, as big as your car."

An expert told him his cows died of pneumonia, Rigmaiden said, but when he "opened up" one of the dead animals, she was "covered inside and just as green as you'd see paint lying on the ground."

Rigmaiden, brought to Washington to testify at Congress' expense, traced the complaints he lodged with local and state officials — complaints that recently resulted in a state board's order that the BFI site be closed by Dec. 31.

BFI says tests are inconclusive and is appealing the closure order.

"They want to regrant the permit," said Rigmaiden. "The area is already 50 feet deep, and they still want to haul the hazardous waste in."

Rigmaiden said that because of fumes "we haven't been able to use fans or air conditioners because it would pull it into the houses, even the brick houses."

Rigmaiden suggested that "you gentlemen look into it."

Rigmaiden's father died of a respiratory ailment and his daughter is in the hospital with a bone problem and a birth defect, said Mike Tritico, a technical adviser to a coalition of citizens' groups protesting the BFI site.

"He knows what it means to breathe the fumes and to have the water burn his skin and to have his father die," Tritico said.

"The family has suffered a variety of things which, of course, BFI claims are unrelated, and the state says they can't be sure of what's what, and the family says all we know is that we were healthy, our animals and our crops were healthy until BFI came along," he said.

## 1983/06/23: Rigmaiden Testimony



Clipped By:

andrewdg

Wed, Feb 20, 2019