

11/9/88

Officials to allow march protesting toxic pollution

By Fred Kalmbach/
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Marchers planning to protest toxic pollution in St. James Parish will be allowed to march next week, despite earlier indications that the group would be denied a permit unless it posted a \$10,000 bond, according to parish officials and march organizers.

Paul Keller, St. James Parish president, today said marchers must post a bond to obtain a permit under a local ordinance. However, he said if the marchers felt they were a labor organization engaged in legal actions, they did not need the permit and could go ahead without it.

Regardless of whether the marchers are granted a permit, some legal experts question whether the permit ordinance's exemption for labor activities is legal.

The Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union Local 4-620 is part of the group that applied for the permit. Esnard Gremillion, chairman of Local 4-620, said the union will march next Wednesday with or without a permit, and that he had written about march plans to the parish council mainly out of courtesy.

Richard Miller of OCAW Local 4-620 said union officials received a letter early this week from Keller that denied their request for an exemption from the bond requirements.

The march is to take place Wednesday as part of the Louisiana Toxics March, which is scheduled to begin Friday in Baton Rouge with a march to Southern University.

Local 4-620 has filed suit against BASF Corp., a major chemical company, to recover benefits lost during a marathon labor lockout. BASF recalled 200 chemical employees to work in October 1987, but permanently replaced 110 maintenance workers.

Pat Bryant of the Louisiana Toxics Project, the umbrella group organizing the march statewide, said Tuesday night that he was going to meet with parish officials today to discuss the matter. Other groups sponsoring the march are Gulf Coast Tenants Leadership Development Project, the Sierra Club and Louisiana Environmental Action Network.

The law stipulates that any group which wants a march permit must put up \$10,000 to ensure against possible damage to public property during the event. An exception is made for labor organizations, which do not need a permit.

The law is probably illegal, according

by his office in accordance with the local permit law.

"I can't decide who to get a bond from or who not to get a bond from," Keller said this morning. "The ordinance applies to all groups.

"(Bryant) says the law is unconstitutional, but that's for the court to decide. I can't make that decision."

It is not clear whether the group's activity would be covered by the exemption for labor organizations, despite the involvement of the local union, Keller said.

Keller noted that a local environmental group that protested three weeks ago against dust from a grain elevator company posted the \$10,000 bond.

The march is to be part of the Louisiana Toxics March, which is scheduled Nov. 11-20. The main march is to start near Devil's Swamp — an area north of Baton Rouge that DEQ officials believe is severely contaminated with industrial waste — and end in New Orleans.

The march planned for St. James Parish is meant to protest legal discharges of toxic waste by Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corp., Occidental Chemical Corp., Texaco Inc. Refinery, Chevron Chemical Co., Freeport Chemical Co. and International Terminal Operating Corp., according to Bryant.