

Residents Seek Aid on Pollution

By BJ CORBITT

Reba Reyna still enjoys walking into the marsh in her backyard, but she says it just doesn't offer the same sensation it did decades ago.

"We used to walk out and the shrimp would come out and nibble on your toes, but not anymore," the Glynn County retiree said.

Living on Shore Drive in central Glynn County for almost 30 years, Reyna knows the marsh has changed. The marsh sits just 25 feet from her back door.

Much of the marine life that used to flow through the marsh - fed by an inland creek from the Turtle River - has disappeared. And what remains isn't suitable for consumption, she said.

She blames the situation on Allied Chemical Corp. and its years of dumping mercury and other chemicals into the Turtle River.

The site of the defunct plant today is a U.S. Superfund Site.

She isn't the only one blaming Allied Chemical for environmental problems. Reyna - along with her husband Warren and daughter Pamela Long - recently joined a class action lawsuit which accuses Honeywell International, formerly Allied Chemical Corp., of dumping tons of mercury and polychlorinated biphenols, or PCBs, into the Turtle River over a 23-year period.

Thirty-four residents have added their names to a list that includes hundreds of people.

"I know that what the pollution has done is (it has) killed everything in our marsh back here," she said.

Honeywell operated the chlor-alkali chemical plant on Ross Road from 1956 to 1979.

The suit also alleges that Honeywell conspired with Linden Chemicals and Plastics - or LCP, which operated the plant from 1979 to 1994 - to keep the dumping quiet.

Surveys of the site by the state Environmental Protection Division and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have revealed elevated levels of mercury, lead and PCBs at the plant site and in nearby water and organic life.

Honeywell spokesperson Victoria Streitfeld said Honeywell will defend the case vigorously but declined to offer further comment.

Roughly 200 parties are seeking damages from the company. Originally filed in 1995, the suit is pending in both Glynn County Superior Court and in U.S. District Court here.

Brunswick attorney Bob Killian, one of the lawyers representing the plaintiffs, declined comment, citing restrictions against speaking to the news media imposed by U.S. District Judge Anthony Alaimo, who has been assigned the case.

The suit alleges that the chemicals from the plants have killed and contaminated much of the area's marine life and posed a danger to people who consume fish from the Turtle River and the creeks it feeds.

The state Department of Natural Resources closed part of the Turtle River and Purvis Creek to fishing in the 1990s and issued a consumption advisory.

The citizens involved in the case are seeking a number of damages from Honeywell, including compensation for lost property values, legal fees and exemplary damages to serve as a deterrent to the company from future actions similar to those alleged in the suit.