

MR. JOE H. GOLDMAN
PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT
PITTSBURGH OFFICE

MR. GARNEY B. SCOTT
POINT COMFORT OPERATIONS

1978-03-29

RE: MERCURY -- LAVACA BAY

The Texas Health Department recently issued a general public warning that consumption of blue crab and/or finfish from Lavaca Bay might be hazardous to human health if consumed regularly and in large quantities. The warning, in the form of a news release from the Health Department, resulted in a spate of media attention in several parts of the state.

The Texas Health Department is, of course, well aware of Alcoa's discharge of mercury into the bay which was halted in 1970. Even though the report from which the news release was drafted provides historical background on the problem, the Health Department chose not to point a finger at Alcoa in the news release. It is apparent that the Texas Health Department is operating on the assumption that Alcoa's Point Comfort Operations is not continuing to contribute to the mercury contamination in Lavaca Bay.

Even though we have been assured that the Texas Health Department is not at this time considering any additional steps to restrict the taking of seafood from the bay (the bay has been closed to the commercial harvesting of blue crab since 1970), it has been learned the Attorney General's office has on three recent occasions sought authority to initiate proceedings to close the bay to all seafood harvesting. While these attempts have been rebuffed by the Health Department, Attorney General John Hill, a candidate for the Democratic nomination for Texas governor, can probably be expected to continue his efforts.

The point of this background discussion is to establish a premise. The latent mercury in the bay will continue to pose a problem for many years and we can expect the "pot to be stirred" at almost any time. It is reasonable to assume the State Health Department will continue to be objective in the matter of the mercury contamination unless tempted to succumb to political pressures, and the general public is apathetic unless stimulated in some manner -- either or both of which could occur.

The recent groundwater contamination "scare" and today's (March 29) Victoria Advocate front page article about the Sportsmen's Clubs c. Texas (SCOT) plea to Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission to close contaminated areas of the bay to fishing gives special focus to the problem.

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Therefore, if we are not already absolutely certain that no additional mercury is finding its way into the waters of Lavaca Bay from Point Comfort Operations, I strongly suggest that whatever measures necessary be instituted to assure ourselves that we can sustain the fact that we are not now contributing to additional mercury contamination of the bay.

Alcoa has a great deal at stake not only locally, but within the State of Texas and nationally in how we continue to deal with the mercury problem in Lavaca Bay.

JOE H. GOLDMAN

JHG:ds

cc: J. A. McGowan - 30
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C. W. Parry - 30
W. H. Shepard - 30
P. R. Atkins/R. H. Carvile - 7
B. D. Dinman - 7
L. S. Sewell, Jr. - 16
F. P. Margaron/H. E. Neegan/C. L. Green - Rockdale
R. P. Campbell - Point Comfort ✓

File copy routed to J. A. Knight, Jr. - 7

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