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ACTIVISTS BEGIN 10-DAY MARCH IN PROTEST OF 'CANCER ALLEY'

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BATON ROUGE, **La.**

BATON ROUGE, **La.** -- A group of **environmental** activists on Friday began a 10-day march across south **Louisiana's** chemical belt to protest air, water and land pollution.

"This action today will represent the coming together of a number of constituents in what is known as Cancer Alley,' said Pat Bryant, executive director of the **Louisiana** Toxics Project.

Gathering first at Devil's Swamp, an abandoned toxic waste dump north of Baton Rouge, the group included members of various **environmental** groups and the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, which represents workers at many of the scores of chemical plants between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

"We're working together for the long haul to assert our rights for clean air, clean land and clean water,' Bryant said.

About 100 protesters carried signs reading "Breath or Death,' "Industry: Clean Up Your Act -- We Have to Live Here' and "Clean Air and Water -- An Endangered Species.'

Greenpeace, an activist **environmental** group, has been taking water samples and analyzing the waste content of chemical plant dumpings in the Mississippi River. The organization recently issued a report suggesting a correlation between higher mortality rates in communities along the river and the presence of chemical plants.

The march first passed two Baton Rouge-area plants and **Rollins Environmental Services**, a controversial hazardous waste disposal firm, before a rally at Southern University.

After traveling through the chemical belt, the marchers plan to wrap up their protest Nov. 19-20 in New Orleans.

Bryant said the marchers intended to "focus our attention on each parish so the people will know what toxins are coming out of each plant.'

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Richard Kleiner, a spokesman for the **Louisiana** Chemical Association, said the industry group welcomed the attention the march was bringing.

"The chemical industry recognizes that **Louisiana** has some **environmental** problems, and some of those problems are related to industry. We think it's important that the **environmental** problems be presented. More importantly, the march is bringing attention to the solutions,' he said.

Kleiner said the industry was involved in programs to control pollutants and was either cleaning up abandoned dump sites, such as Devil's Swamp, or reaching agreements to do so.

"Over the past 10 to 15 years, the petrochemical industry has reduced hydrocarbon emissions in the air by 60 percent. We've reduced pollutants to the Mississippi River by 90 percent, and we have instituted hazardous waste reduction programs. The programs to reduce these hazardous emissions will continue,' he said.

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---- Index References ----

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