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## Plaquemines residents voice fears about proposed coal export facility, train traffic

Plaquemines coal facility meeting 1-22-14

Audrey Trufant-Salvant, of Ironton, is seen on the right, leading a group break-out session during a meeting on a proposed new coal facility in Plaquemines Parish. In the foreground, a sign reads "Big Coal makes us sick." (*Benjamin Alexander-Bloch*)

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**Plaquemines Parish** residents on Wednesday evening (Jan. 22) voiced fears that **a proposed coal export facility** would lead to health problems and bring increased train traffic to their communities.

"Residents of Ironton are fighters," said Audrey Trufant-Salvant of Ironton, a community near the proposed RAM Terminals LLC coal facility in Myrtle Grove and a few miles from the International Marine Terminal coal facility in Port Sulphur. "We have always had to fight for our basic needs, and now we are in the fight of our lives trying to stop the intrusion of coal terminals in our neighborhoods.

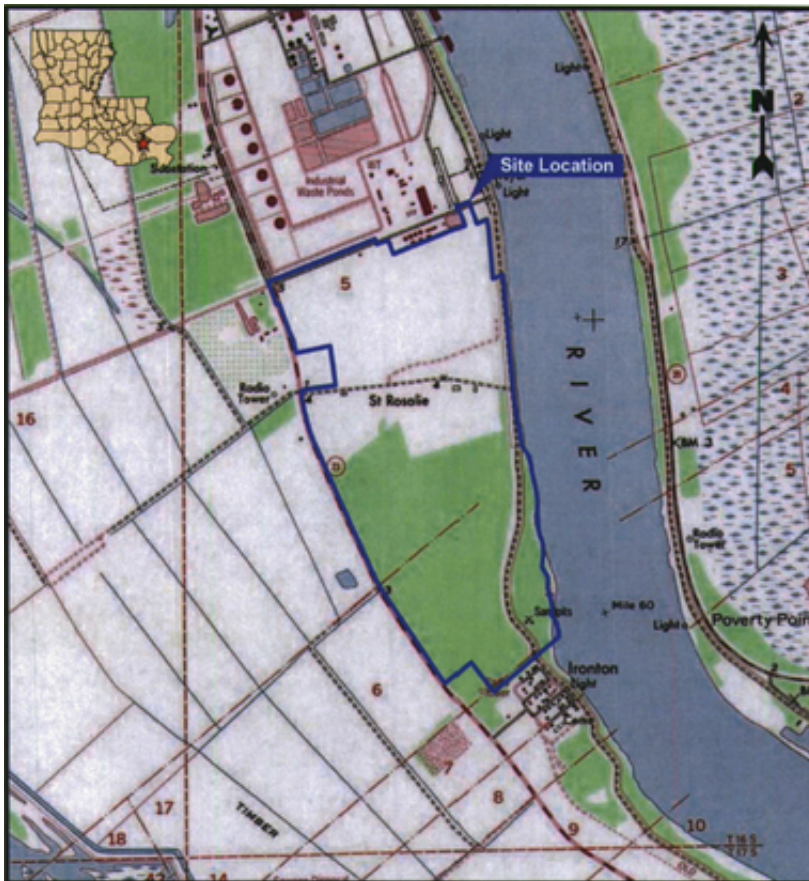
"We are not against big business," Trufant-Salvant said, "but we don't want it at the expense of our quality of life."

The **Clean Gulf Commerce Coalition** -- a coalition of local and national environmental groups -- and some local residents have been fighting the proposed RAM plant, which they say would add to the environmental impacts from the two coal facilities already in Plaquemines: the IMT facility and the **United Bulk Terminal** in Davant, on the **Mississippi River's** east side.

Plaquemines Parish Councilman **Burghart Turner**, who represents Ironton and other communities next to the proposed RAM facility, said Wednesday's meeting was to make more residents "aware that there is a movie that is coming and it is going to be a nightmare."

Devin Martin, conservation coordinator for **Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign**, told residents "to keep the pressure up."

Retired Lt. Gen. Russell Honore also spoke to the group of more than 50 people who attended the meeting in Belle Chasse Auditorium, about the coal dust "destroying our water and destroying our air."



#### View full size

The proposed RAM Terminals LLC coal and petroleum coke facility would be on the property marked in blue.

Providence Engineering &  
Environmental Group, Louisiana  
Department of Environmental Quality

"You go to bed at night thinking that the government is protecting the air. Guess what, they are not!" said Honore, who since retiring has been speaking out on local environmental issues, often referring to his "Green Army," a loosely affiliated group of environmental groups and concerned citizens. "We have lax environmental laws here in Louisiana. Nobody is going to save you but you.

"We have to stop being the nation's stomping ground," he said.

**Air testing last fall by some Plaquemines residents** near the International Marine Terminal found elevated fine particulate matter, known as PM-10, that could potentially cause health concerns to sensitive people if there was long-term exposure.

In addition to dust from the proposed coal facility, residents and environmental group

representatives spoke about the danger of more and more uncovered rail cars transporting coal. Also under discussion: possibly expanding rail lines so trains could continue past the proposed RAM facility down to the IMT facility and possibly even farther south to various oil companies in western Plaquemines.

"We must examine the full cost of uncovered coal trains rolling through communities," said **Grace Morris** of the Gulf Restoration Network.

In small group sessions, residents spoke of their concerns that the rail lines could harm their property values and that the dust could not only harm their own health but the parish's famous orange groves as well.

"And the people in Belle Chasse aren't aware that this will affect them too," Turner said. "These cars will pass through their community too."

Louisiana accounts for about 20 percent of U.S. coal exports, mostly because of its location at the intersection of Mississippi River barge routes serving Midwestern states with large coal deposits and Gulf shipping routes serving Europe and Latin America, according to **a May report** from the National Mining

Association.

The New Orleans customs district, which includes Plaquemines, was second in the United States in terms of coal exports, according to **a quarterly report** by the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

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