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Odor issues in Brunswick discussed at town hall

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Brunswick City Manager Regina McDuffie talks with Andrew Burroughs, executive director of the Brunswick-Glynn County Joint Water and Sewer Commission.

Terry Dickson/The Brunswick News



Glynn Environmental Coalition board members and Executive Director Rachael Thompson speak with representatives of GP Cellulose Thursday night at Greater Works Ministries.

Terry Dickson/The Brunswick News

In his last hours on the job Thursday night, GP Cellulose spokesman Randal Morris promised the company on the marsh west of Brunswick would continue to take all complaints about odors seriously and take action.

“If something happens and we produce an odor, it’s not intentional,” Morris said. “We’re going to investigate, we’re going to mitigate and we’re going to apologize.”

Morris, who is retiring as the plant’s public affairs manager, made that promise at the beginning of a two-hour public information session at Greater Works Ministries new conference center at 4020 Wylly Ave. where GP Cellulose and the Brunswick-Glynn County Water and Sewer Commission set up booths to answer questions, provide information and hear from the public.



Residents have complained for the last couple of years about foul odors mostly on the western side of Brunswick. Many of the complaints have been about a rotten egg smell that is characteristic of hydrogen sulfide, a gas produced in GP Cellulose's processes in which they cook soft wood to free the fiber to make fluff pulp. The mill is among the largest producers of fluff pulp in the world.

Steve Kuhlman explained that it is a closed process and that all the hydrogen sulfide gases are contained in a closed loop, captured and burned as fuel — as are the pine bark and lignin, the organic compound that binds the tree cells together.

Kuhlman said GP Cellulose is still investigating complaints and acknowledges it is partially responsible for odors some find unpleasant.

In its investigations, the company has found some things it can do to further prevent leaks "even if we're not the main source," he said.

There weren't many citizens at the meeting and Rachael Thompson, executive director of the Glynn Environmental Coalition, said she understands why.

Many of those who have reason to complain aren't comfortable talking to the company.

"The community in the past has been concerned about backlash," Thompson said.

"People who complain want anonymity, and they can't get that here."



Thompson said the Glynn Environmental Coalition has received more than 300 complaints since December 2020 that include coughing and irritation of the throat and skin. It appears that the effects of the irritant are exacerbated when the wind is near calm and when the temperature is between 45 and 60 degrees, she said.

If the weather is a factor in the severity, then GP Cellulose should “roll it into their permit,” she said.

The complaints don’t go to the company directly. Instead, they were registered with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, which triggers an investigation.

If there are questions about GP Cellulose’s responsibility for odors there is no question that Joint Water and Sewer’s wastewater treatment plant is a source.

“We have localized issues at Academy Creek. If you drive by the plant, you’ll notice it,” said Andrew Burroughs, executive director of the water and wastewater utility.

But Burroughs said the end is approaching with the installation of a couple of tanks that will capture the noxious gases.

“The manufacturers guarantee a 99% removal,” in the two-stage process, he said.

Although officials said Pinova was invited, the company did not send representatives. When it was still operating as Hercules, the plant was a frequent source of odors until it enclosed its wastewater impoundment area.

The company did not respond to an email seeking comment.