

# Chemcentral goes before Council

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A 20-acre tract of land and the chemical company that wants to move there, became the topic of conversation once again during a workshop meeting of the Pearland City Council Monday night.

The workshop was held to allow representatives of Chemcentral to outline their plans regarding their desire to relocate their facility from Houston to Mykawa Road on the Pearland/Brookside Village border.

Pearland Mayor Tom Reid stressed the purpose of the workshop shortly after calling it to order.

"We want to make sure that our I's are dotted and our T's are crossed by asking some of the questions that we all have," Reid said.

Since it was a workshop session, and not a regular council meeting, members of the audience were not able to address the council or the Chemcentral representatives.

The meeting began with a short slide presentation of the land where the chemical facility would be located.

Following the slide show, Mark Hacas, Chemcentral regional vice-president, addressed the council.

During his remarks, Hacas voiced the desire for Brookside Village and Pearland residents to form a, "Citizen's Advisory Committee."

"Such a group will express community questions, much like residents of Brookside Village did a few weeks ago, and allow us fair opportunities to address those concerns," Hacas said.

After giving a brief overview of the proposed facility Hacas went on to display some samples of products that Chemcentral packages for its customers. Some of the products displayed were paints, pine cleaner, and shampoo.

"I need to emphasize that Chemcentral is a distribution company. Chemcentral is not a manufacturer," Hacas said.

Following Hacas, Jerry Kung and Jennifer Junker, project engineers from Zephyr Environmental outlined the steps they took in drafting the air quality permit which was submitted to the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission.

"We calculated information based on over predictive numbers," Junker said. "By doing this, Chemcentral will never exceed the emission standards stated in the permit. Furthermore, the emission control system goes above and beyond what is required."

The Air Quality permit was in the final stages of approval, but the TNRCC decided to start the process over again after it was discovered that Chemcentral did not place a legal notice in a Spanish language newspaper.

Patrick Miller, president of Planning and Construction Associates, the Kentucky based firm which designed the proposed Chemcentral Pearland site was next at the podium.

Miller addressed concerns regarding safety at the Chemcentral facility.

"We have found Chemcentral to be very concerned about safety during the 18 years that we have worked with them," Miller said

Miller went on to try to alleviate fears expressed by some residents at a previous council meeting regarding chemical tanks hurdling through the air.

"Even if there was a fire in a tank, there are new safety precautions that would not let a tank explode," Miller said.

Those safety systems, according to Miller, would cause the tank to vent before it built up enough pressure to explode.

Another issue brought up by the council was water safety. According to Miller, the Chemcentral site would, "make it impossible for groundwater to be contaminated."

Following comments from Chemcentral representatives, Pearland Fire Department officials addressed concerns regarding fires at the proposed plant and the city's ability to fight them.

"We have innumerable resources we can draw on through mutual aid agreements with neighboring communities. We also have yearly hazmat training for our personnel, said Paul Jamison, Pearland Fire Chief. "We have never had a serious problem responding to a fire."

Jamison went on to state that a call to the Houston Fire Department revealed that there had been no fire related calls to Chemcentral's Houston facility in the last 10 years.

Aside from the Fire Department responding to an emergency, Chemcentral officials are also trained in fire suppression.

"Our people are trained in battling small fires to keep them from turning into big fires," Hacas said.

There would also be a foam suppression sprinkler system to battle any potential blazes.

Larry Steed, Pearland Fire Marshal, was next at the podium. Steed stressed that the greatest potential for catastrophe would not come from the proposed chemical site, but from rail cars already passing through the area.

"Our greatest concern is with the rail cars, not stationary buildings that we know we can control," Steed said. "We have been very lucky so far that there hasn't been a major rail incident."

Council member Larry Marcott, echoed Steed's statement on rail safety.

"Those rail cars are a real concern, especially when we don't know what is in them," Marcott said.

Following the presentation by fire officials, the topic turned to zoning. Darrin Coker, city attorney for Pearland, addressed those concerns.

According to Coker, the proposed property has been zoned for industrial use since 1986.

"Obviously, the city needs to be consistent in its actions and treat Chemcentral like we treated the previous two businesses in the area that do the same thing," Coker said. "This facility could have been built in 1986 and they would not have had to comply with as many restrictions as they have now."

Following Coker's remarks, council member Klaus Seger said that the zoning rules should be changed to allow the city more authority in determining what businesses go where.

Chemcentral is being given tax abatements and other incentives to relocate to Pearland. A fact that appeared not to be sitting too well with Council member Woody Owens, who asked if the city could decide not to support the project by withholding the incentives.

According to Coker, that is not an option.

"The city has entered into a binding contract with Chemcentral. All the hurdles have been completed. The only way the city could get out of the contract would be if there were evidence that Chemcentral had been misleading or fraudulent in their activities. At this time, there is no evidence that they have acted fraudulently. I would not recommend the city breach this contract," Coker said.

The workshop was moderated by Alan Mueller, interim city manager.

"Hopefully, the council and the public have had the opportunity to hear both sides of the story," Mueller said.