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# Groups oppose Formosa Plastics expansion

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AUSTIN — Union officials and environmental groups joined forces Wednesday to protest the proposed \$1.3 billion expansion of Formosa Plastics near a major shrimping ground.

Representatives of Greenpeace, Texans United, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union, the Texas Building and Construction Trades Council and Calhoun County Resource Watch urged the Texas Air Control Board not to grant a permit for part of the project.

Formosa wants to add seven new polyvinyl chloride plants to its Calhoun County facility, 100 miles southwest of Houston. The board will consider a permit for a marine loading facility and tank farm today.

Union officials said construction and safety standards at the plant have been poor. The Houston Post earlier reported that three workers had died in separate incidents between 1990 and 1991, triggering federal fines and citations. Gale Van Hoy of the Building and Construction Trades Council called it "the shoddiest, the cheapest and the worst (construction job) I've ever seen."

Company officials denounced the press conference as an attempt to drum up support for union organizers and said Van Hoy had never visited the plant. The plant expansion is expected to create 5,000 jobs.

Formosa spokesman Joe Wyatt said: "Our safety record is excellent." Wyatt said Formosa has been in compliance with federal job safety standards since the citations were issued last year.

Rick Abraham of Texans United said the Taiwan-based company "is a notorious polluter with one of the worst environmental records in the nation."

Diane Wilson, president of Calhoun County Resource Watch, said the unusually high number of dolphin deaths this year point to serious problems in Lavaca Bay. Federal officials say more than half the 200 dolphins that washed up on Texas beaches this year were found in Calhoun and Aransas counties.

The bay, site of several other chemical plants, has already been closed to crabbing and fishing and is on a list of potential Super Fund clean-up sites, Wilson said.

Shrimping is still allowed, but Wilson said there have been suggestions that conflicts between industry and shrimping be resolved by "removing shrimpers off the area."