

Formosa reclaiming powder from pond as part of cleanup

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POINT COMFORT — Formosa Plastics Corp. is reclaiming plastic powder from sludge at the bottom of a pond as part of a cleanup ordered by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Texas Water Commission in February.

The polyvinyl chloride plastic is being sold to Hawk Plastics of Alabama which will use the material to manufacture floor tiles and plastic pipe for sewer and irrigation systems.

"It's not our top quality material," said Bob Wallace, director of the plant's regulatory affairs division, "but it can be used as feedstock and that will keep it from going into landfills."

When the plant's wastewater treatment plant is complete, the pond will be closed to further use.

Formerly the pond was used to neutralize the plant's process and storm water before it was sent to the aeration plant and then to the wastewater treatment plant.

During the plant's manufacturing process, polyvinyl chloride polymer is created as a powder suspended in water. The plastic powder is then distilled from the water and packed into bags for shipment.

"Of course we try to remove all of the plastic powder from the process water but a very small amount remains," Wallace said.

And over a period of time, even those small amounts settle and accumulate in the sludge at the bottom of the pond, he added.

Getting approval from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Texas Water Commission so that the company could reclaim the material proved to be a challenge, he said.

To comply with Texas Water Commission and EPA regulations, the plastic powder must be removed from the pond's sludge within the boundaries of the pond, Wallace said.

But if any of it splashes or is spilled beyond the pond's confines, it must be treated as hazardous waste, he said. "Then it has to be

injected into a deep well or taken to a landfill."

The cleanup and change in regulations that Formosa must follow stem from an agreement between Formosa and the EPA in February 1991 that ended a long-term dispute.

For years, Formosa maintained that the plant's holding ponds were part of its wastewater treatment system, and as such, were not subject to EPA rules that govern the disposal of hazardous waste.

The EPA disagreed. The agency charged that Formosa had contaminated underground water and soil at the plant by improperly handling and disposing of hazardous solid waste.

Formosa agreed to replace its hazardous waste storage tanks with new tanks and to comply with federal laws that govern the handling of hazardous waste.

The company also agreed to pay a \$3.375 million fine and to establish a \$1 million trust fund for environmental education and community outreach programs.

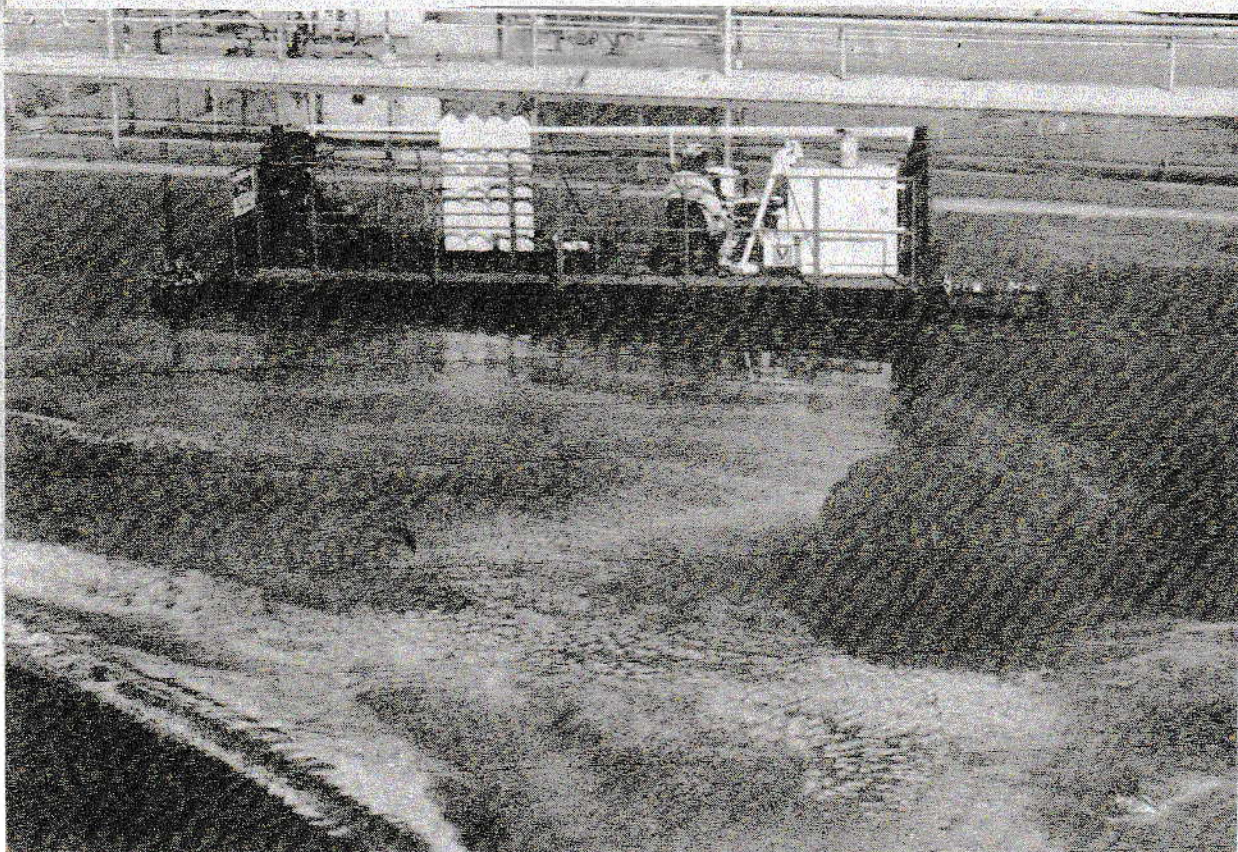


Photo by Formosa Plastics Corp.

A dredge is being used to reclaim plastic powder from sludge at the bottom of an industrial pond at the Formosa Plastics Corp. plant near Point

Comfort. The powder will be used to manufacture floor tiles and plastic pipe for sewer and irrigation systems.