

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 15, 2000

For Information, Contact:
Drew Bohan: 805-563-3377
Cell: 805-455-2396
Vicki Clark: 805-963-1622
Cell: 805-689-3253

NEWS RELEASE

TOXIC CHEMICALS FOUND AT HALACO SITE

Santa Barbara ChannelKeeper To Sue Local Polluter to Force Clean Up

OXNARD, CA – At a news conference today, Santa Barbara ChannelKeeper, represented by the Environmental Defense Center, announced its intention to sue Halaco Engineering Co., a metal smelting facility located right next to Ormond Beach in Oxnard, to force it to clean up toxic chemicals that have been leaking into the air, water and ground at the site for over 20 years. Neighbors, environmental groups and citizens concerned about the operation's effects on human health, wildlife and the sensitive Ormond Beach ecosystem gathered in front of the facility in support of the action.

The notice of intent to sue charges Halaco with violating numerous environmental laws intended to protect public health, including the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act and Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. In 1980, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) determined that Halaco was violating the Clean Water Act by, among other things, discharging waste to the Ormond Beach Wetlands. In July 1980, the EPA ordered Halaco to stop all discharges of pollutants, including hazardous wastes, and required Halaco to submit a plan to restore the wetlands to their natural state. Two decades have passed and Halaco has still not fixed the problem.

In addition to the water quality problems caused by the plant, Halaco has been discharging air contaminants in violation of the Clean Air Act since at least 1990. A recent health risk assessment of the Halaco facility conducted by the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District (APCD) found significant cancer and chronic noncancer risks from Halaco's air emissions. The emissions from the plant have not gone unnoticed. Over the years, APCD has received hundreds of complaints from community members who claim they have suffered from inhaling the fumes emitted by Halaco's operations.

(more)

“Halaco has violated the Clean Water Act and other environmental laws for many years, and we aim to put a stop to it,” said Drew Bohan, Executive Director of Santa Barbara ChannelKeeper. “Halaco needs to be a responsible neighbor and clean up its toxic mess.”

For the last three decades, Halaco has piped contaminated wastewater from its facility into a series of waste ponds located on a 25-acre dump directly adjacent to Ormond Beach and Ormond wetlands. These waste ponds have no liner to prevent the contaminated waste from entering the groundwater that underlies Halaco’s property. Government officials recently discovered high concentrations of numerous toxic chemicals, including radioactive thorium 230, in the ground and water at Halaco’s Oxnard facility. In February and March of this year, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board issued Tentative Cease and Desist Orders to prohibit Halaco from continuing to break the law by discharging toxic substances into surface water and groundwater.

The company periodically scoops out the metal filings and other contaminants that sink to the bottom of the waste ponds and piles it around the outside of the ponds, forming what is now a 40-foot high slag heap located just a quarter mile from the ocean. This slag heap is porous, so contaminated liquid from the settling ponds passes right through it into the wetlands and creeks that flow into the ocean. The massive slag heap is not posted with warning signs and is unfenced, leaving curious children and other passersby at risk.

The Ormond Beach and the Ormond Beach Wetlands provide habitat for 30 species of birds, including several threatened and endangered species. Ormond Beach serves as a popular recreation spot for neighboring residents and visitors, who walk along the beach, swim and surf in the ocean.

Santa Barbara ChannelKeeper is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the ecological health of the Santa Barbara Channel, its watersheds and habitats. Currently a project of the Environmental Defense Center (EDC), ChannelKeeper uses advocacy, education, scientific study and enforcement to insure the well-being of the Channel. For more information, call (805) 563-3377. The EDC is a non-profit, public interest environmental law firm serving California’s Central Coast since 1977. For more information, contact EDC at (805) 963-1622.