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# County is No. 1 state polluter

Future reports will be less detailed

By Rob Pavey | Staff Writer

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Toxic emissions in Richmond County rose slightly in 2005 and preserved the city's No. 1 ranking among Georgia counties with the highest volume of chemical releases to air and water.

"Augusta came out on top, but Chatham was just slightly ahead in the category of carcinogens," said Jennette Gayer, policy advocate with Environment Georgia, an Atlanta-based watchdog group.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which released its annual Toxic Release Inventory data Thursday, Augusta industries released 11,253,898 pounds of toxins in 2005, up 312,149 pounds from the 10,941,749 pounds released in 2004.

The 2005 data are the most recent year for which complete figures are available; 2006 data are scheduled for release in 2008.

Augusta's largest polluters are almost always the largest industries, which include PCS Nitrogen, 4,249,142 pounds; DSM Chemicals, 3,258,442 pounds; and International Paper Co., which reported releasing 2,781,575 pounds during 2005.

The primary pollutants released in Augusta include ammonia and nitrogen wastes. Sulfuric acid, dioxins, benzene and a host of solvents including toluene also are commonly used chemicals.

Mercury releases rose from 782.3 pounds in 2004 to 973 pounds in 2005, according to data released Thursday.

All but a fraction of that amount comes from a single source: Olin Chemical Corp.

Olin's 40-year-old plant on Doug Barnard Parkway is among just eight sites in the United States that still use mercury cell technology to make chlorine; 53 chlorine factories have mercury-free processes.

Sadly, Ms. Gayer said, the 2005 data released Thursday will be among the last available to the public because of pending changes in reporting requirements.

"With the changes that are coming, they will not have to report in as much detail what they are releasing, and if they are releasing under certain amounts, it will not have to be reported," she said.

"This report confirms that communities across Georgia are routinely put at risk by toxic pollution linked to serious health impacts," Ms. Gayer said.

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