

Green Party Candidate for Attorney General Vivian Houghton Denounces DNREC Response to Sunoco Pollution

Newark - - Vivian Houghton, Green Party Candidate for Delaware Attorney General, denounced the tepid response by the Delaware Department of Natural Resources (DNREC) to the release of massive amounts of sulfur dioxide into the air in Claymont. "DNREC has a history of failing to move decisively to curtail pollution by Delaware's large chemical companies," Houghton stated, then added, "Sunoco should cease operations until it can dispose of its chemical wastes without causing health-threatening air pollution. Delaware needs an Attorney General who will be pro-active in enforcing environmental laws."²

Houghton's comments were made in response to last Friday's (4/5/02) General Chemical's processing boiler break down leaving it unable to process sulfur-containing waste from the Sunoco oil refinery. Sunoco, rather than shutting down, continued to operate and resorted to burning the waste, releasing approximately 20 tons of sulfur dioxide each day into the air. The air pollution continues today.

Houghton insisted that DNREC's oversight failure with regard to this issue is part of a state trend in which both the criminal justice system and agencies designed to serve residents display obsequiousness to the powerful. In this context she cited DNREC's softness on Delaware's polluters as similar to the criminal justice system's relative coziness with white-collar criminals, in contrast to its strictness with less favored sections of the population – for instance, the African-American community, low-income whites, etc. "Just as Sunoco should cease operations until it can safely dispose of its chemical waste," Houghton said, "so the criminal justice system should investigate its internal biases of being so quick to hand out tougher sentences to minorities and low-income people than to better-off constituencies."

Cornelius "C" Deleston, a General Motors employee at Wilmington's Saturn plant, echoed this concern. "It's Sunoco one day, another company the next. They pay fines but the fines are so small that the companies keep right on polluting. On the other hand, when these companies lay off workers, they do to the workers what DNREC refuses to do to the polluters: get rid of them. Tell me, what's fair about that? While people suffer, the companies do whatever they want. They violate their workers' trust, fire or lay off people, and poison our air and water."

The Delaware Clean Air Council should be commended for its plans to sue Sunoco, but if DNREC was doing its job a citizen suit would not be needed,³ commented Alan Muller, Executive Director of Green Delaware, an activist group. Green Delaware plans to bring a suit against the City of Wilmington for its failure to warn citizens about the dumping of raw sewage into the Brandywine and

Christina Rivers. We need to strengthen our environmental laws and enforce the laws now on the books, stated Muller. "The Attorney General's job is to enforce Delaware laws on behalf of the people of our state, not special interests. The people of Delaware are suffering unnecessarily from cancer and other serious illnesses brought on by pollution."

Nick Galasso, a Green Party member, expressed similar sentiments. "DNREC," he remarked, "is pretty good at going after the small individual but when it comes to the big polluters like Sunoco, Motiva, and Indian River Power Plant, DNREC's record of law enforcement is dismal. Vivian Houghton will change this. Whether as polluters, financial sleight-of-hand artists, or centers of anti-worker planning, Delaware's corporations will be held accountable for their actions."

Houghton will formally announce her candidacy for Attorney General on 4/29/02 in a series of statewide press conferences.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Robert Bohm, Coordinator
Committee to Elect Vivian Houghton Attorney General
(302) 239-2572 rebsalerno@msn.com

Green Party of Delaware
<http://www.gpde.org>

Green Party of the United States
<http://greenpartyus.org>