

Coalition wants laws enforced, unhappy with trends

Group to present report at Friday meeting in Montgomery

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FAIRHOPE, Ala. — A statewide coalition of environmental and citizen groups will present a report Friday at a meeting of the Alabama Environmental Management Commission, claiming that environmental enforcement actions have declined during recent years.

"The number one pollution problem seen throughout the state is the lack of enforcement by the state agency charged with protecting our environment and natural resources" said Casi Callaway, executive director of Mobile Baykeeper. "A law is only useful if is enforced, and the Alabama Department of Environmental Management must return to the job of protecting our community."

On Aug. 7, the ADEM Reform Coalition submitted a report to the AEMC that analyzes compliance and enforcement statistics throughout the state, according to a news release issued by that coalition of some 40 member groups, including Mobile Baykeeper, Alabama Rivers Alliance and Conservation Alabama.

The report will be presented by David Ludder, an attorney who conducted the study for the group, at the April 21, 11 a.m. meeting in Montgomery.

The AEMC is the governing board of ADEM, with the power to promulgate rules, hear administrative appeals, and hire and fire the ADEM director, said Adam Snyder, executive director of Conservation Alabama.

Most of the information in the report is from data made available to the public by the Environmental Protection Agency, and some data is taken from ADEM sources, according to the news release.

"Almost all of the data indicates that compliance and enforcement trends in Alabama are down significantly," the news release stated.

The state environmental agency had not developed a response to the report by press time, according to an ADEM spokesman.

The news release states that evidence of the agency's lack of enforcement has been seen locally in the South Alabama area.

"In West Mobile along the new Highway 98 route, in Fairhope with several development projects as well as sewage violations, sewage violations in Bayou La Batre and many more area problems, Mobile Baykeeper has seen chronic violations by the Alabama Department of Transportation, developers, municipal and private sewage treatment facility operators, and many more while ADEM has provided little or no enforcement action," Callaway said.

During the past year, ADEM has issued two "notices of violation" regarding local construction projects in Fairhope and proposed an \$11,000 fine against the developer of the Publix Super Market and shopping center.

The study highlights a major decline in ADEM inspections and enforcement actions of water pollution permits, while noncompliance rates continue to rise, according to the news release.

"The ADEM Reform Coalition is looking to ADEM and the (AEMC) to explain and reverse these trends," said Ludder, who served as ADEM's general counsel in the mid-1980s.

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