

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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## SECRETARY HICKEL WILL OPPOSE CHEMICAL PLANT UNLESS ENVIRONMENT IS PROTECTED

Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel today warned a firm planning a chemical plant on a South Carolina estuary that his Department will fight its operations unless environmental safeguards are forthcoming. He said such assurances have not yet been received.

The firm, a German corporation, is Badische Anilin and Soda Fabrik (BASF). Its plan to build a major petrochemical complex near Beaufort has resulted in many protests from conservationists.

In a letter to the president of BASF, Secretary Hickel said the Interior Department would "strenuously oppose" degradation of the estuary's water quality or dredging that would destroy fish and wildlife habitat.

In separate letters, Secretary Hickel has asked the cooperation of Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Robert H. Finch, Secretary of the Army Stanley R. Resor, and South Carolina Governor Robert E. McNair in working toward environmental protection in the matter.

Interior's interest centers on the impact the plant would have on water quality, shellfish, and fish and wildlife habitat.

In his letter to Hans Lautenschlager, BASF president in New York City, Secretary Hickel commented upon water quality aspects:

"The area in question is a splendid estuary, virtually free of pollution and protected against degradation from the present condition by the non-degradation statement in the South Carolina water quality standards. Our scientists and engineers advise that it is technically feasible to construct a plant with no effluent that would completely protect the existing water quality of the area. This Department would strenuously oppose any action which would result in degradation of that water quality. The water quality standards established by the State of South Carolina, pursuant to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, as amended, have been approved to date by the Department of the Interior and thereby become joint State-Federal standards requiring my concurrence for any changes of those standards."

Concerning effects to wildlife, Secretary Hickel wrote:

"Construction of proposed navigation channels to serve your plant could damage the estuarine environment by destroying fish and wildlife habitat. By direction of the Congress, we have special responsibility for the protection of the estuarine environment. Estuaries constitute a fragile and limited area of our country, and there is substantial public awareness of the need for wise management to protect and improve them. The handling of hazardous cargoes such as petroleum and petroleum derivatives can lead to accidents which could further damage the environment. Under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act 16 U.S.C. 661 et seq, this Department analyzes every proposal of the Corps of Engineers for channelization and makes recommendations concerning the advisability of construction. This Department will oppose strenuously any proposal for channel dredging which would cause environmental damage or which would cause a significant increase in environmental hazards."

Secretary Hickel said that he requested Secretary Finch to consider possible air pollution of the facility and its potential impact on the community.

In his letter to Governor McNair, Secretary Hickel said:

"Over and above my statutory responsibilities, I am very much concerned personally with the need expressed by the President that the task of cleaning up or preserving our environment calls for a total mobilization by all of us and involves governments at every level."

The Corps of Engineers is studying the feasibility of a navigation channel which would connect the chemical plant to the sea.

In his letter to Army Secretary Resor, Secretary Hickel stressed that Interior has considerable concern over the chemical plant's environmental impact. He noted that BASF officials "have not as yet provided us with assurance that means and measures will be taken to prevent damage to the environment.

"The channelization of the rivers and sounds to serve the plant may also have a severe adverse effect on the environment of the area, now in splendid, natural condition.

"We cannot, at this time, support a Federal project which is not consonant with the interest of this Department and the Environmental Policy Act. We would strongly oppose such a project."

Last November the BASF Corporation made application to the Secretary of the Interior for an import quota for 40,000 barrels a day of naptha from foreign sources for use in the plant. Secretary Hickel noted that he has no authority at this time to grant the requested allocation.

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