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House hears 2 sides of PFOA;
Bill drafted on issue has not been passed
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Lawmakers on Thursday heard the chemical "PFOA" is an absolutely terrible cancer-causing agent and DuPont is practically bombarding Pascagoula with the stuff - this from residents, environmentalists and a labor union official.

Then they heard from DuPont and the Mississippi Manufacturers Association that PFOA is harmless, with "no known health effects" and the company is putting out only minuscule, couldn't-hurt-a-fly levels of it.

State Rep. Jamie Franks Jr., D-Mooreville, chairman of House Conservation and a candidate for lieutenant governor, on Thursday held a committee hearing on the DuPont PFOA issue, and he has drafted House Bill 1021 aimed at putting a moratorium on permits regarding perfluorooctanoic acid, or PFOA.

No vote was taken on the bill in committee.

"It's certainly a concern, if these allegations about it are true," said Rep. Michael Janus, R-Biloxi, a committee member. "But we don't know enough about it at this point, in my opinion, to take a vote. Two hours ago, none of us knew what a PFOA was. We just haven't had enough information from either side."

The deadline for committee passage of bills is Tuesday. The PFOA bill, if it were to pass the full House, is expected to die in the more big-business-friendly Senate.

Residents, the Sierra Club and the United Steel Workers union testified against DuPont and PFOA.

At least one resident, retired Navy Cmdr. Robert Hardy, said eight members of his family are either sick with cancer or have died from it. His wife is currently sick. He blames this on high levels of pollutants in manufacturing-heavy Pascagoula, which is rated one of the worst areas in the nation in toxic pollution and cancer rates.

"I'm not a tree-hugger," Hardy said. "But I am pragmatic, and of the school that if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's a duck... This is the next asbestosis and the next tobacco, and it's staring DuPont right in the face."

DuPont Spokesman David Booth testified PFOA is "essentially a high-tech detergent" that has been used for 50 years in manufacturing plastic and "as there are no known health effects from PFOA, House Bill 1021 doesn't do anything to improve the public's health or safety."