

# NPL Site Narrative for ALCOA (Point Comfort)/Lavaca Bay

## ALCOA (POINT COMFORT)/LAVACA BAY Point Comfort, Texas

**Conditions at Proposal (June 23, 1993):** The ALCOA/Lavaca Bay site is located in Calhoun County in southeast Texas along the Gulf of Mexico. The Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA) Point Comfort plant is located on the shore of Lavaca Bay. The site includes contaminated sediments in the bay and an associated man-made dredge spoil island located approximately 1,200 feet west of the ALCOA plant. The dredge spoil island is composed of a 91-acre gypsum lagoon and a dredge spoil area (covering approximately 50 acres) that includes five lagoons. The ALCOA plant is located in an industrial area approximately 1.5 miles south of Point Comfort and 4 miles northeast of the City of Port Lavaca.

In 1965, ALCOA opened a chlor-alkali production plant that produced chlorine gas and sodium hydroxide through an electrolytic process that utilized mercury cathodes. The two primary sources of hazardous substances at the site identified by EPA to date are the gypsum lagoon and the dredge spoil areas. During the plant's operation, waste water containing mercury was discharged into Lavaca Bay through outfalls located on the off-shore gypsum disposal lagoon. Dredge spoils contaminated with mercury were disposed of in several areas on the site. EPA sampled sediments in Lavaca Bay in September 1992, and found mercury at levels significantly above concentrations in background samples.

In 1970, the Texas Water Quality Board (predecessor to the Texas Water Commission), in response to information received from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Texas Department of Health (TDH), issued an Emergency Order against ALCOA finding them responsible for the mercury discharged to the off-shore gypsum lagoon. The order also stated that these discharges contaminated Lavaca Bay, creating harmful and possibly toxic conditions for humans, animals, and aquatic life. In the same year, ALCOA restricted the discharge of mercury into Lavaca Bay to concentrations below regulatory levels. In April 1988, the TDH issued a public warning prohibiting the harvesting of fish and crabs from portions of Lavaca Bay near the site.

Lavaca Bay is an estuary of the Matagorda Bay system and is used for both commercial and recreational fishing. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Lavaca Bay also serves as a habitat for a number of endangered aquatic and bird species.

**Status (February 1994):** EPA is considering various alternatives for the site.

For more information about the hazardous substances identified in this narrative summary, including general information regarding the effects of exposure to these substances on human health, please see the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) ToxFAQs. ATSDR ToxFAQs can be found on the Internet at [ATSDR - ToxFAQs](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp) (<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp>) or by telephone at 1-888-42-ATSDR or 1-888-422-8737.