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Mostly Clear
75°

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2theadvocate News

DEQ site opens door to map data

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Whether someone is trying to find how to get to that perfect fishing spot or wants to know more about a neighboring industry, a map creation program from the state can help.

The state Department of Environmental Quality GIS Center's "Make A Map" link on the state Web site allows residents to get map information for a specific area or statewide.

Designed to allow DEQ staff better access to map information from their desk computers, an improved version of the program was launched on the public Web site last summer at <http://www.deq.state.la.us>.

"We tried to make it as intuitive as possible," said Joe Holmes, geographic manager in the GIS Center.

Currently, there are no good numbers as to how many people outside the agency access the map-making program on the DEQ Web site, because every time someone generates a new map, that's considered a hit.

We do want those kind of statistics," said Daniel Smith, technical support specialist at the GIS Center. Smith said they're looking into getting some of the software that can help track that to see if it's getting much use from the public.

However, the program has gotten some use from DEQ staff.

"It's reduced the number of simple requests because this will do simple stuff," Smith said.

However, because everyone in the agency has access to the information, more people who weren't familiar with what the center does are now aware, so they're getting more requests from people who may not have made them before, Smith said.

The online version offers simple steps to lead a site user through choosing the location of the map, what kind of information, such as roads or industrial facilities should be included and the type of map resolution.

Once the map is generated, there is a lot of information that can be taken from the map, from finding exact coordinates to an area to information about features that were placed on the map. For example, if a map was made with a listing of industries that report pollution to the federal government, a click on that site will bring up that federal report.

An upcoming feature will include a directory of existing maps that are in the DEQ library, Holmes said.

"I've begun to put all our maps online since 1999," he said. This feature is available to agency staff only, but could eventually be put on the Internet.

Aside from the public aspect of their work, the center works on a variety of DEQ projects and investigations from ozone formation to nonpoint pollution prevention.

Paul Zundel, deputy director of the GIS Center, said center employees are working with other departments and agencies to develop maps that indicate where ozone came from and hopefully show "plumes" of ozone. Part of that work would involve modeling what ozone might do, he said.

"They even have models that will go around buildings and up buildings and down," Zundel said. "But you've got to be careful because it's real touchy."

You can predict something will happen, but as soon as the wind makes a shift or some other variable changes, your model will be wrong, he said.

In another project, the GIS Center worked with the Amite River Basin Commission to fly over the entire river from Lake Maurepas to the Mississippi state line. Using a combination of the global positioning system and video, a helicopter could record the exact time, date and location of the images captured by the video.

Because of the accuracy of the information, they can fly back over and see how the area has changed over the years and maybe pinpoint problem locations, Zundel said.

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