

# Thousands of Argentines decry pulp plant

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GUALEGUAYCHU, Argentina --

Some 20,000 demonstrators marched to Argentina's river border with Uruguay on Saturday to protest the impending startup of a paper pulp plant in the neighboring country they fear will pollute the environment.

The peaceful protest came two days after Uruguay authorized the Finnish-built plant to begin converting eucalyptus trees into pulp, the base ingredient for paper. Uruguay says its studies show it will operate within legal pollution limits.

But the Argentine government and environmentalists object to the plant, which is located on the border river, saying soybean, citrus and other crops in Argentina are at risk of contamination.

"No to the paper plant!" read banners during the march. A caravan of thousands of cars honked their horns en route to the bridge, where Argentine police blocked them from entering the elevated two-lane crossing to Uruguay.

Protest boats also plied the Uruguay River close to the Uruguayan side as demonstrators aboard lit flares and shouted over bullhorns for the plant to be closed. Uruguayan coast guard boats looked on but did not intervene.

Organizers said the number of protesters was 40,000, but an Associated Press reporter estimate the size at about 20,000.

The Finnish consortium Oy Metsa-Botnia AB and Kymmene Corp. said Friday it had begun ramping up operations for the startup of the plant, a process expected to take days.

The \$1.2 billion plant - the biggest foreign investment project in Uruguay's history - is intended to create 600 jobs and boost Uruguay's exports by 15 percent. The paper it produces is to be exported to the United States, Europe and Asia.

Demonstrators said they hoped the International Court of Justice at the Hague, which is hearing the dispute, would side in favor of Argentina.