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1 — $500 million in Ike relief is still unspent. Will Texas do better after Harvey?, Texas Tribune, 11/3/17
https://www.texastribune.org/2017/11/03/tensions-mounting-over-how-divvy-harvey-relief-funds/
State officials want as few parameters as possible on federal disaster relief funds, but housing advocates say that could lead to public works projects getting federal funds over Texans who lost everything.

2 — After Chemical Fires, Texans Worry About Toxic Effects, Texas Public Radio, 11/3/17
https://whyy.org/npr_story_post/massive-government-report-says-climate-warming-humans-cause/
Shannan Wheeler was born and raised in Baytown, Texas, an industrial suburb east of Houston that is part of the so-called chemical coast. Houses are tucked between chemical storage tanks. Parks back up to refinery smokestacks.

3 — Massive government report says climate is warming and humans are the cause, NPR, 11/3/17
https://whyy.org/npr_story_post/massive-government-report-says-climate-warming-humans-cause/
It is "extremely likely" that human activities are the "dominant cause" of global warming, according to the most comprehensive study ever of climate science by U.S. government researchers.

4 — EPA to hold hearing on climate plan repeal in West Virginia, Washington Post, 11/2/17
http://wapo.st/2gYvtl3
The Trump administration announced Thursday it will hold a public hearing in West Virginia on its plan to nullify an Obama-era plan to limit planet-warming carbon emissions. The state is economically dependent on coal mining.

5 — A series of small earthquakes continue in central Oklahoma, Fox 23, 11/2/17
http://www.fox23.com/news/oklahoma/a-series-of-small-earthquakes-continue-in-central-oklahoma/637350428
A series of small to moderate earthquakes continue to strike in central Oklahoma. The U.S. Geological Survey has recorded about a dozen quakes since Tuesday near Hennessey, about 45 miles (72 kilometers) northwest of Oklahoma City.

6 — Scott Pruitt Talks About Changes At EPA, News 9 OKC, 11/3/17
http://www.news9.com/story/36753384/news-9-exclusive-scott-pruitt-talks-about-changes-at-epa
As Oklahoma Attorney General, Scott Pruitt not only vowed to fight crime, but to also fight Washington. During his term here, he led a crusade against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, now he's running it.

7 — Pruitt grant directive applies to all 22 advisory panels, E&E News, 11/2/17
https://www.eenews.net/eenewspm/2017/11/02/stories/1060065521
U.S. EPA will apply new membership standards to all of its 22 federal advisory committees, not just three singled out earlier this week, a spokesman confirmed today.

8 — U.S. quits world effort to combat oil, mining corruption, E&E News, 11/2/17
https://www.eenews.net/eenewspm/2017/11/02/stories/1060065519

The Trump administration today pulled out of an international initiative to make oil, gas and mining companies disclose their payments to governments as a method to lessen conflict and corruption worldwide.

9 — Paul Habans Charter unveils the 1st 'green schoolyard' in New Orleans, New Orleans Times-Picayune, 11/2/17
http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2017/11/paul_habans_charter_schoolyard.html#incart_river_index
A drum cadence played by student musicians filled the air at Paul Habans Charter School Thursday morning (Nov. 2) as the Algiers school unveiled the city's first ever "green schoolyard."

$500 million in Ike relief is still unspent. Will Texas do better after Harvey?

> State officials want as few parameters as possible on federal disaster relief funds, but housing advocates say that could lead to public works projects getting federal funds over Texans who lost everything.

BY **MORGAN SMITH** AND **BRANDON FORMBY** NOV. 3, 2017 9 HOURS AGO

U.S. Air Force member conducted search and rescue operations on Galveston Island after Hurricane Ike on Sept. 13, 2008. Staff Sgt. James L. Harper Jr.

In Harvey's Wake

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The devastation was swift, and the recovery is far from over. Sign up for our ongoing coverage of Hurricane Harvey's aftermath. You can help by sharing your story here or sending a tip to harvey@texastribune.org. MORE IN THIS SERIES →

The billions in long-term disaster relief dollars that will fund Texans' recovery from Hurricane Harvey's devastating blow are still far from reaching state coffers. But there's already tension brewing over how much federal money should be spent to fix flood victims' homes and how much should go toward repairing government buildings and launching new flood control projects.

Those critical choices will hinge on a key decision: Who will control how the money is spent, the federal government or Texas?

State leaders want as few limitations as possible on what could be the biggest influx of federal recovery money to ever hit the state, arguing that officials in cities and counties battered by the storm know best whether money should go to individual households or public works projects.

The state's requests for flexibility — followed by Gov. Greg Abbott's Tuesday trip to Washington to deliver a $61 billion wish list predominantly made up of Harvey-related infrastructure projects — have sparked alarm from veterans of previous battles over long-term recovery funding.

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With the recent past as their guide, they fear homeowners and impoverished communities will get shortchanged in favor of large-scale infrastructure projects that could have little connection to disaster recovery.

They point to Hurricane Ike, which struck Galveston in 2008 and flooded an estimated 100,000 homes along the Texas coastline not long after Hurricane Dolly hit the Rio Grande Valley.

At the time, the state received $3 billion from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the federal agency that oversees long-term rebuilding from natural disasters. A Texas Tribune review of projects funded with that money found it went to a wide range of purposes that local officials tied to disaster recovery, including building new community centers in at least eight different counties, replacing lights at a Little League baseball field, putting a new roof on a sports stadium, and restoring a beach pavilion.

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Yet almost 10 years later, more than $500 million — most of it earmarked for housing-related projects — for Ike and Dolly recovery still hasn't been spent.

"The hard truth of this is there aren't going to be enough resources to make everyone whole, there aren't going to be enough resources to harden all the infrastructure, there just aren't," said Maddie Sloan, a lawyer for Texas Appleseed, an advocacy nonprofit. "So there have to be priorities set, and how priorities get set is a big deal."

Some local officials have already begun to push for using long-term recovery money from the federal housing department for infrastructure projects.

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At a meeting in Houston's flood-prone Meyerland neighborhood last month, the city's chief resilience officer told a crowd of hundreds that officials are "actively pursuing" HUD money to use as the local contribution toward flood control projects that would also be funded through other federal sources.

"We can use HUD money for local shares of other stuff," Stephen Costello said.

Meanwhile, more than 51,000 southeast Texans are still displaced and living in hotel rooms, more than two months after Harvey slammed into the coast, dumped more than 50 inches of rain in some areas and damaged more than 563,000 homes. More than 149,000 people have qualified for rental assistance while they wait out repairs or look for a long-term place to call home. An unknown number are living with family or friends or paying for their own short-term housing needs.

"It's often the case that the needs of Texans to rebuild and recover don't rise to the same level of some of those government projects that people have in mind," said John Henneberger, co-director of the Texas Low Income Housing Information Service.

How the money will flow

Abbott split long-term disaster recovery efforts between the land office and a commission headed by Texas A&M University Chancellor John Sharp. The two entities have told federal officials they need a collective $121 billion to help cities, counties and families recover, though it's still unclear how much overlap there could be in the two requests. State leaders have also been clear that they aren't expecting to get all they ask for.

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The land office is overseeing housing assistance programs, including long-term recovery dollars that typically go toward rebuilding houses or repairing damaged apartments. But the land office is also overseeing infrastructure projects that could be funded from the same pot of money.

The commission Sharp leads is focusing on flood control, roadways, water services projects and buying out or elevating flood-prone houses. While Sharp's commission compiled a 301-page report detailing money needed for public works projects across the Texas coast, no state or federal agency has put together a comprehensive account of the damage Harvey did to Texans' homes.

Instead, state officials' request for long-term housing money is an estimate based on the number of households requesting immediate emergency aid, the average cost of a Texas house and how much money it cost to rebuild houses in previous disasters.

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Land office leaders readily admit that many Texans may not receive federal assistance to cover their losses from Harvey. They also say that for the cost of rebuilding a handful of damaged homes, they can pay for projects that can protect many more homes from future floods.

"So the locals need the ability to make that determination on what's the best way to benefit that particular area," said Pete Phillips, a senior director with the state's General Land Office.

But giving local elected leaders that level of discretion is what has some housing advocates worried.

"That's absolutely what created the problems before," Henneberger said.

State priorities challenged after Ike, Dolly

In many ways, concerns about the rebuilding process are rooted in Texas' problematic history of disaster relief spending.

The lump-sum relief funds HUD gives states and local governments comes with some restrictions on how the money can be used. Those stipulations usually include how long the public has to weigh in on state and local plans for the funds, thresholds for how much

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must go toward housing rather than infrastructure and a minimum amount that must be spent to help low- and moderate-income disaster victims.

"The goal is not to hand everybody a little bit of money," Henneberger said. "The goal is to make sure that the limited amount of money can help those who could not otherwise recover."

After Ike and Dolly, the state put two separate agencies — one for housing and one for non-housing projects — in charge of overseeing local governments' use of the money.

Local officials quickly used that money to rebuild infrastructure, while a large portion of the money that should have gone to help Texans rebuild their homes remains unspent nearly a decade later.

At the time, monitoring reports from the federal housing department blamed that slow trickle of money for housing on bureaucratic chaos at the state level. Gov. Rick Perry blamed the delays on the federal government.

A year after Ike and Dolly hit, Henneberger's and Sloan's nonprofits accused Texas officials of violating fair housing laws and HUD's own rules for spending disaster funds.

The advocacy groups said in a complaint to HUD that the state used flawed data in deciding how to split relief money between public works projects and Texans whose homes were damaged by the hurricanes. They also said the state effectively "steered resources away" from hurricane victims by awarding a $16.6 million contract to a consulting firm that helped local governments understand how disaster grants work and identify infrastructure projects that would qualify.

In a May 2010 agreement between the state and the nonprofits, the federal housing department forced Texas to rework its plan for the relief funds. The department also increased the amount of money that Texas was required to spend on lower-income residents and ordered the state to use more than $200 million to rebuild, replace, buy out or construct housing for lower-income Texans.

Today, $297 million of unspent Ike and Dolly money is earmarked for housing recovery. That includes money set aside for public housing in Galveston, where plans for affordable units have been mired in opposition from other residents, politics and federal complaints for years.

While the state holds the money and ensures recipients spend it according to HUD's parameters, it's up to local governments like cities and counties to turn those dollars into construction projects. The General Land Office has managed the funds since 2011, and officials there say they plan to close out remaining projects by the end of 2019.

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Sloan, with the Texas Appleseed Project, said the state's performance has improved since the state land office began overseeing the second round of hurricane relief funding.

"There've been dramatic increases in the amount of home repair money going to low-income households, better benefits to renters of different income levels, and the state has said every infrastructure project needs to benefit low- and moderate-income people," she said.

But Henneberger said the lack of a comprehensive plan to help Texans put their lives back together after Harvey — and the overwhelming focus on infrastructure in the state's wish list released this week — is frustrating and worrisome.

"We want to see that the money is targeted fairly between infrastructure and individual benefits to disaster survivors who need to recover their lives and rebuild their homes," Henneberger said.

Worry in Meyerland

In the past two months, Congress has agreed to spend more than $51.8 billion on disaster relief following a string of natural calamities including three hurricanes and California's deadly wildfires.

The federal housing department has yet to determine how to divide the money among the affected states and territories, but the agency said it will do so based on which areas have the greatest "unmet need," said spokesman Brian Sullivan. They make that evaluation using data from insurance claims, FEMA, and the Small Business Administration, which provides disaster relief loans to homeowners.

"Everybody is collecting information about the places that were hit the hardest, who suffered the greatest degree of serious or maybe even severe housing damage, how many families were insured or uninsured, it's like you've got to untangle this ball of yarn," Sullivan said.

While government officials continue taking stock of the overall impact, hundreds of thousands of Texans are still slogging through their individual recoveries. At last month's meeting in Meyerland about flood control projects, tensions boiled over inside a church packed with hundreds of residents listening to officials discuss infrastructure and federal funding.

The houses in that neighborhood straddling Houston's Brays Bayou were inundated with feet of water after Harvey battered southeast Texas — some for the third time in as many years. Many residents are waiting to see if their repeatedly-flooded homes will be

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targeted for buyouts, while others who flooded for the first time this year are months or years from learning if there will be federal money to help them fully rebuild.

Some Meyerland residents asked officials about particular flood-control projects during the meeting's question-and-answer portion. Others had more immediate needs on their mind.

"Some people don't care about long-term plans," Larry Zomper said once he got a turn at a microphone. "We wanna know how to live now, what decisions to make now."

Disclosure: Texas Appleseed and Texas A&M University have been financial supporters of The Texas Tribune. A complete list of Tribune donors and sponsors is available here.

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After Chemical Fires, Texans Worry About Toxic Effects

By REBECCA HERSHER (/PEOPLE/REBECCA-HERSHER) • 17 HOURS AGO

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Shannan Wheeler says he suffered chemical injuries on his arms after a fire broke out at the Arkema chemical plant 3 miles from where he lives. He's now part of a lawsuit against the company.

WILLIAM CHAMBERS FOR NPR

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Originally published on November 3, 2017 7:35 am

Large fire breaks out at Arkema plant

Shannan Wheeler was born and raised in Baytown, Texas, an industrial suburb east of Houston that is part of the so-called chemical coast.

Houses are tucked between chemical storage tanks. Parks back up to refinery smokestacks.

"I grew up around five of the biggest petrochemical facilities on the planet," Wheeler says. An uncle worked at Chevron. Another worked at Shell. "With my family's history I'm familiar with every one of them," he says.

The Wheeler name is synonymous with business in the area. Shannan Wheeler's mother, Tracey, is the longtime president of the Baytown Chamber of Commerce (http://www.baytownchamber.com/Custom2.asp?pageid=6533), and he has spent his entire career as an engineer designing pipe systems for petrochemical facilities.

So Shannan Wheeler, 52, is as surprised as anyone that he's part of a federal lawsuit against a chemical company, especially one that employs people in the town where he and his family live now.

The lawsuit alleges Arkema, a chemical manufacturer (http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/08/31/547504624/explosions-reported-at-flooded-arkema-chemical-plant-in-crosby-texas), failed to protect nearby residents after its plant in Crosby, Texas, was flooded with 50 inches of rain during

Hurricane Harvey, and chemicals caught fire. The suit alleges residents weren't warned about the danger posed by the resulting smoke.

A company spokeswoman says Arkema rejects the claims that it failed to warn people about the danger from the smoke. The company also said it urged people to heed evacuation orders.

The Arkema facility makes and stores organic peroxides, volatile chemicals used in plastic manufacturing, among other things. They need to be kept cool so they don't ignite. When water knocked out power to the plant, workers moved the organic peroxides to refrigerated trailers.

But as the water continued to rise, plant workers were evacuated and the trailers flooded. The chemicals inside got warmer and warmer until they started to catch fire.

Local emergency officials evacuated a zone with a 1.5 mile radius around the plant.

Over the course of the next five days (http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/09/04/548381095/remaining-flood-damaged-volatile-arkema-chemical-plant-containers-have-burned-ou), nine trailers containing organic peroxides burned. People outside the evacuation zone wondered if they should be worried too. Smoke from the fires was visible for miles. Some residents worried the blazes might be putting dangerous chemicals into the air.

At first, Wheeler wasn't concerned. His home is more than 3 miles from the Arkema plant – double the evacuation distance — in a quiet part of town surrounded by sod farms. When the fires first started, he could see just the faintest wisp of smoke over the trees.

And official press conferences seemed to confirm there was nothing for him to worry about. Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez said "exposure to smoke from these organic peroxides is similar to standing over a campfire." When pressed by a local reporter about potential hazards from the smoke, Bob Royall, the assistant chief of emergency operations for the Harris County Fire Marshall's office, said:

> "What I know from doing research is these things are going to catch on fire. They're going to burn with intensity. Most of the material is going to be consumed by very hot fire. From what I have researched and understand, the byproducts of that is going to be black smoke with carbon particles in it."

Richard Rennard, an Arkema executive who spoke at press conferences for the company during the crisis, described the smoke (http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1708/31/cnr.03.html) as "noxious," adding "if you breathe in the smoke, it's going to irritate your lungs." He reiterated that the evacuation zone, with a radius of 1.5 miles, was sufficient. But neither he nor local emergency officials warned people outside the zone to take precautions, such as staying inside or turning off intakes on air conditioners.

"Something's wrong here"

Wheeler first noticed the acrid smell the evening of Thursday, Aug. 31, after the fires began. "Usually in the evenings around here we get ground fog that comes it," he says. "It's really kind of pretty." But that evening the fog smelled like leaks he'd encountered working at petrochemical facilities.

"The first smell I got was like battery acid," he said. He went inside his house, thinking something was wrong. When he went back outside a couple hours later the odor had changed to "something like bleach and ammonia."

"Well, next morning came out and that's when we noticed these black oily splotches in this flower bed," Wheeler says, pointing at a strip of dirt just outside his front door. "They were bubbly and black, different from anything I've seen before. They looked like they collected where the dew was."

On Friday, the same thing happened; the fog rolled in, bringing with it a smell like burning plastic. The dew deposited dark bubbly residue in his flower bed. He noticed pieces of black ash — some of it rounded like bubbles, some more like delicate sheets — lying in the grass. When he touched the ash with a screwdriver, it fell apart. "I called the [local police] emergency line and asked, but they didn't know anything. They were in the dark like we were," says Wheeler.

Two days later, on a Sunday, Wheeler was at home watching the local news when he felt the house shake a little. "You could feel it. Like 'Boom!' And then a few minutes later another one."

Arkema and emergency officials had decided to purposely ignite (https://twitter.com/hcfmo/status/904507205424173057) the six remaining containers of organic peroxides. A company statement said (http://www.arkema-americas.com/en/media/news-overview/news/Update-on-Arkema-Inc.-Crosby-Plant/) that it was the only way to be sure that the hazard posed by the unstable chemicals had "been fully eliminated."

That day, "directly over those trees right there to the east, [I saw a] thick black column going up," Wheeler remembers. "And it was going pretty good. We watched it for about 10 minutes until it went up, and it got right under the cloud cover, and it rolled over. You could see it roll over like it hit a ceiling, and it spread."

To Wheeler it seemed like the wind was carrying the smoke toward his house. From farther away, the column appeared (https://twitter.com/rhersher/status/904445493761204224) to dissipate up and out in every direction.

"All of the product has been successfully and safely burned," Arkema's Rennard said at a press conference (https://www.click2houston.com/news/arkema-to-intentionally-burn-remaining-trailers-at-crosby-chemical-plant) after the controlled burn was over. "We have seen no evidence of any issues with [air quality monitoring] results."

That night, there was no fog — and no odor — at the Wheeler house.

A week later, Wheeler mowed his lawn for the first time since the fires. "I wear a respirator, for grass allergies, so I didn't notice anything while I was mowing," he says. After he was done, he picked up the grass clippings. "I was wearing gloves, and back behind the gauntlet of the glove, up on my wrist and everything, it

was starting to sting a little bit, like I was in ants," he says.

But there were no ants.

"Another four, five, six handfuls of grass and [I thought], 'This is bothering me!' I looked, and I noticed welts coming up along my wrists, down my thumbs, on both hands."

The pattern was familiar.

"I've had enough training from my work that I thought, 'These look like chemical burns,' " Wheeler says. He yelled to his son to get baking soda and rubbed it on his wrists to ease the pain. The next day, he went to his doctor, who diagnosed it as dermatitis, or skin irritation, caused by chemical exposure, the complaint says.

The fire, the smoke and the ash

Organic peroxides like the ones that burned at the Arkema plant are known for being highly reactive. In fact, their reactivity is useful for manufacturing, because the chemicals help the building blocks of plastics assemble into long chains.

But their reactivity also means organic peroxides have to be stored carefully. At the Arkema facility they were being stored as chilled liquids. After the power went out, the liquid heated up and caught fire.

"These reactions produce a lot of heat," says Michelle Francl (https://www.brynmawr.edu/people/michelle-francl), an organic chemist and the director of chemistry graduate studies at Bryn Mawr college, who isn't involved in investigating the Arkema fires. The intense heat can be a good thing, because it means the peroxides burn completely. "When [organic peroxides] burn at the temperatures that they would burn at in this kind of fire, they turn into carbon dioxide and water. The peroxides turn out to be the easiest part of this whole thing."

"This is carbon, hydrogen and oxygen," says William Carroll (https://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/pressroom/experts/william-carroll.html), an adjunct professor of chemistry at Indiana University who worked on organic peroxides for the chemical industry for more than 30 years. "There's nothing exotic in there. On the basis of what I know about this material, I would sincerely doubt that people a mile and half away were exposed to much in the way of organic peroxides."

But it wasn't just the chemicals that burned, Arkema emission reports say. The vessels they were in and the refrigerated trailers where they were stored also burned. "A truck fire is ugly," says Carroll, who isn't involved in the investigations or lawsuits. "You've got wood, you've got metal. Burning a truck trailer is not something you want to do at a picnic."

Photos released by the U.S. Chemical Safety Board (http://www.csb.gov/arkema-inc-chemical-plant-fire-/), which is investigating the fires, show the remains of the refrigerated trailers. The metal is charred and twisted. The storage containers are no longer visible. The pavement is covered in thick, black, ashy residue.

"Everything from the labels on things, to the whatever plastic or in some cases metal that the containers are made out of — all that stuff is not going to burn completely," says Francl. "It's going to turn into ash, and then it's going to absorb other chemicals that didn't burn entirely." The ash can travel through the air in tiny particles or in larger pieces.

"I don't want to get rid of Arkema"

A week after the fires, Wheeler agreed to join a lawsuit against Arkema, alleging the company didn't do enough to protect residents from physical damage and damage to their property. In the complaint (https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/4117128-Wheeler-et-al-v-Arkema.html) filed in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas, he and 14 other plaintiffs describe rashes and respiratory problems they say were caused by chemical exposure.

In the complaint, 0ne resident who walked through flood water near the factory describes "lesions and burns" on his legs. Another alleges he got sick from fumes after he was told not to evacuate his home, which is less than a tenth of a mile beyond the evacuation zone.

A separate lawsuit (https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/4117125-0920-Arkema-Amended-Petition-9-20.html) by a group of first responders describes "police officers doubled over vomiting, unable to breathe" and alleges the cause was "toxic fumes" from the Arkema fires.

A spokesperson for Arkema, Janet Smith, wrote in an email to NPR:

> "We deeply regret that anyone experienced temporary ill effects from this incident, particularly first responders who worked with us side-by-side to keep the public safe. However, we reject any suggestion that Arkema failed to warn of the danger of breathing smoke from the fires at the Crosby plant. Arkema officials urged the public, for their own safety, to respect the 1.5-mile evacuation zone imposed by the Unified Command well before any fire. It is also our understanding that those first responders who went to a hospital were released without being admitted to the hospital. Arkema will vigorously defend against any lawsuit we believe is mistaken in its claims."

She declined to comment further, citing ongoing litigation.

There is also a criminal investigation (http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Arkema-plant-under-criminal-investigation-by-12242152.php) by the Harris County District Attorney; a lawyer in charge of the probe confirmed one is underway but declined to give further details. The Environmental Protection Agency (https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/4117123-ARKEMA-114-EPA-101117.html) and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (https://www.tceq.texas.gov/news/statement/statement-on-arkema-investigation) are both investigating the fires.

It will likely take months to analyze contamination at the Arkema plant, but there are some early indications about what chemicals were spread by the blazes.

During the fires, the EPA flew a plane equipped with monitoring equipment through the plume, looking for evidence of unsafe levels of about a dozen chemicals, and reported (https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/4117124-Arkema-ASPECT-Detections-20170907.html) "trace" amounts of peroxide and butane. "As with any fire, there was smoke," says EPA Acting Regional Administrator Sam Coleman, but "we did not see any of the constituents of concern at levels we considered unhealthy."

Air emissions reports (https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/4118173-Arkema-TCEQ-Air-Emissions-Reports.html) filed by Arkema list more than 65,000 pounds of chemicals as well as more than 17,000 pounds of particulate matter released as a result of Hurricane Harvey.

Frankl says smoke and ash from any fire can cause problems. "It doesn't matter whether it was a chemical plant or not, the issues are real," she says. "People's lungs are irritated. There's a lot of unknown stuff floating around. Irritants can damage your lungs." The effects can be worse for babies or elderly people, or people who have asthma or other respiratory issues.

Being a good neighbor

Shannan Wheeler is quick to say he didn't join the lawsuit against Arkema to get money, and he's not even trying to hurt the company.

"Running business and jobs and money out of town is completely foreign to me," he says. "So no, I don't want to get rid of Arkema." Instead, he says, it's about getting information about what happened, and holding the company accountable for what he refers to as "not being a good neighbor."

"I need to know that my property is safe for me and my family and my dogs," he says. "Right now, I don't trust that I'm not going to be exposed to something on my own property in the future that came from that facility. And if this happens again – I mean, we live in a place that gets hurricanes – will things go better?"

Wheeler says that his family history with the petrochemical industry is why he's suing the company, and not the local government, even though local emergency officials backed up almost every statement made by Arkema executives during the disaster.

"They only knew what the company told them," he says. "I've worked for companies, I know what being a good neighbor looks like. They should have warned us. If they had told us to evacuate, I would have gone."

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MARY LOUISE KELLY, HOST:

We're going to revisit a community hit hard by Hurricane Harvey. Crosby, Texas, is home to a chemical plant owned by the company Arkema. After that plant lost power in the storm, trailers of unstable chemicals caught fire and burned for days. Some people who live in the community say they were hurt by those fires. And as NPR's Rebecca Hersher reports, they're suing.

REBECCA HERSHER, BYLINE: Shannan Wheeler lives on the outskirts of Crosby. He likes to sit out front in the evenings. It's where we talked as the sun went down and the mosquitoes came out.

SHANNAN WHEELER: Usually in the evenings around here, we have a ground fog that comes in. It's really kind of pretty sometimes.

HERSHER: The house is 3 miles from the Arkema plant, about a 30-minute drive from the Houston suburb where Wheeler grew up.

WHEELER: I was born and raised in Baytown, so I grew up around five of the biggest petrochemical facilities on the planet. And with my family's history, I'm familiar with every one of them.

HERSHER: An uncle who worked at Chevron - his mom runs the local chamber of commerce. And Wheeler designs pipe systems for petrochemical plants. When the Arkema fire started burning, the evening fog smelled like something he'd only ever encountered at work when equipment leaked.

WHEELER: The first smell that I got smelled like battery acid. Something's wrong here.

HERSHER: The air hurt his throat. He noticed dew was leaving strange black residue in his flowerbeds. And then things got worse. A couple days later, he was at home when he heard a distant boom. The windows shook a little.

WHEELER: Directly over those trees right there to the east - thick, black column going up, and it was going pretty good.

HERSHER: Wheeler called Harris County 911 looking for information. The dispatcher told him all we know is the chemicals are burning on purpose. Arkema had deliberately ignited the remaining chemicals at the plant. Over the next few days, the putrid smell around his house mostly went away.

WHEELER: The following Saturday, I decided to go ahead and mow the yard because it was a week overdue anyway.

HERSHER: When he was done, he scooped up the clippings with his hands.

WHEELER: I was wearing gloves, but I noticed back behind the gauntlet of the glove up on my wrist and everything, it was starting to stain a little bit. And I looked, and I started noticing redness. And it was a slight swelling, but I noticed welts coming down along my wrists, down my thumbs, you know, on both of them - on both hands.

HERSHER: He rubbed baking soda on the welts. The next day, his local doctor diagnosed it as chemical dermatitis.

WHEELER: And sure enough, he said that's a chemical burn. And that's bad when you can't even cut your grass.

HERSHER: Wheeler blames the ash from the fire, but that doesn't square with the official version of what happened. Wheeler's house is way outside the evacuation zone for the plant. As the fires were burning, officials were saying it was safe there, like at this press conference by Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez and the assistant fire marshal, Bob Royall.

(SOUNDBITE OF PRESS CONFERENCE)

ED GONZALEZ: Arkema company officials and the Harris County Fire Marshal's Office have told us that exposure to smoke from these organic peroxides is similar to standing over a burning campfire.

BOB ROYALL: What does it mean for people's health? You don't want to stand in smoke, do you?

HERSHER: A spokesperson for Arkema wrote in an email to NPR, quote, "we reject any suggestion that Arkema failed to warn of the danger of breathing smoke from the fires at the Crosby plant." The EPA, Harris County district attorney and U.S. Chemical Safety Board are all investigating. Analyzing contaminants from big fires is hard under the best circumstances. It's extra difficult when they happened in the middle of a huge storm. But multiple organic chemist told me the chemicals that burned - they're called organic peroxides - are probably not the problem.

MICHELLE FRANCL: The peroxides turn out to be the easiest part of this whole thing.

HERSHER: Michelle Francl is an organic chemist and professor at Bryn Mawr College.

FRANCL: Peroxides, when they burn at the temperatures that they would burn in this kind of fire, turn into carbon dioxide and water.

HERSHER: But the containers for the chemicals and the refrigerated trailers where they were being stored - they burned, too.

FRANCL: Everything from the labels on things to whatever plastic or metal that the containers were made out of - all that stuff is going to turn into ash, and then it's going to absorb other chemicals that didn't burn entirely. So the ash is nasty.

HERSHER: Chemists warn that figuring out exactly what chemicals are in the ash can be really hard. But after the fires, local people got together to file a lawsuit alleging that the ash and smoke caused the rashes and respiratory problems suffered by Wheeler and others. Wheeler joined the lawsuit against Arkema even though he wants the company to stay in Crosby.

WHEELER: Running business and jobs and money out of town is completely foreign concept to me. So no, I don't want to get rid of Arkema.

HERSHER: But he does think that they owe the town something.

WHEELER: We want them to be accountable. That's what you do. You have a responsibility to the community.

HERSHER: He wants to force the company to plan and communicate better because, he says, this is the Gulf. There will be another storm. Rebecca Hersher, NPR News. Transcript provided by NPR, Copyright NPR.

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Massive government report says climate is warming and humans are the cause

By Christopher Joyce · November 3, 2017

Hurricane Harvey delivered record rainfall to east Texas. Many scientists believe that climate change helped to make the storm wetter. (Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

It is "extremely likely" that human activities are the "dominant cause" of global warming, according to the most comprehensive study ever of climate science by U.S. government researchers.

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The climate report, obtained by NPR, notes that the past 115 years are "the warmest in the history of modern civilization." The global average temperature has increased by about 1.8 degrees

The findings contradict statements by President Trump and many of his Cabinet members, who have openly questioned the role humans play in changing the climate.

"I believe that measuring with precision human activity on the climate is something very challenging to do," EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said in an interview earlier this year. "There's tremendous disagreement about the degree of impact."

That is not consistent with the conclusions of the 600-plus-page Climate Science Special Report, which is part of an even larger scientific review known as the fourth National Climate Assessment. The NCA4, as it's known, is the nation's most authoritative assessment of climate science. The report's authors include experts from leading scientific agencies, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NASA, and the Department of Energy, as well as academic scientists.

The report states that the global climate will continue to warm. How much, it says, "will depend primarily on the amount of greenhouse gases (especially carbon dioxide) emitted globally." Without major reductions in emissions, it says, the increase in annual average global temperature could reach 9 degrees Fahrenheit relative to pre-industrial times. Efforts to reduce emissions, it says, would slow the rate of warming.

"This is good, solid climate science," says Richard Alley, a geoscientist at Penn State University, who says he made minor contributions to the report's conclusions on sea level rise. "This has been reviewed so many times in so many ways, and it's taking what we know from ... a couple of centuries of climate science and applying it to the U.S."

The assessments are required by an act of Congress; the last one was published in 2014. Alley says this year's goes further in attributing changes in weather to the warming climate, especially weather extremes. "More heat waves and fewer cold snaps, this is very clear," he says. The report also notes that warmer temperatures have contributed to the rise in forest fires in the West and that the incidence of those fires is expected to keep rising.

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Some of the clearest effects involve sea level rise. "Coastal flooding, you raise the mean level of the ocean, everything else equal you get more coastal flooding," Alley says. The report notes that

The report also points out that heavy rainfall is increasing in intensity and frequency across the U.S., especially in the Northeast, and that is expected to keep increasing.

Other connections are harder to nail down, Alley says, such as whether a particular hurricane can be attributed to climate change.

"The Climate Science Special Report is like going to a doctor and being given a report on your vital signs," says environmental scientist Rachel Licker of the Union of Concerned Scientists. She notes that the authors assessed more than 1,500 scientific studies and reports in making their conclusions.

Alley adds that the new report "does a better job of seeing the human fingerprint in what's happening." He says that while he hasn't read all of it yet, he sees no evidence that it has been soft-pedaled or understates the certainty of the science.

Alley notes that "there's a little rumbling" among climate scientists who are concerned that the Trump administration will ignore this effort. "I think the authors really are interested in seeing [the report] used wisely by policymakers to help the economy as well as the environment."

The report has been submitted to the Office of Science and Technology Policy at the White House. Trump has yet to choose anyone to run that office; it remains one of the last unfilled senior positions in the White House staff.

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The Washington Post

Business

EPA to hold hearing on climate plan repeal in West Virginia

By Michael Biesecker | AP November 2 at 10:47 PM

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration announced Thursday it will hold a public hearing in West Virginia on its plan to nullify an Obama-era plan to limit planet-warming carbon emissions. The state is economically dependent on coal mining.

The Environmental Protection Agency will take comments on its proposed repeal of the Clean Power Plan in Charleston, the state capital, on Nov. 28 and 29.

"The EPA is headed to the heart of coal country to hear from those most impacted by the CPP and get their comments on the proposed repeal rule," said EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt. "The agency looks forward to hearing from all interested stakeholders."

No other public hearings have yet been scheduled. EPA will also accept written comments about the proposed repeal through mid-January.

"We encourage stakeholders to participate, and submit comments online — including any requests for additional public meetings," said Liz Bowman, an EPA spokeswoman. "As this is a vital issue that affects people across the country, we will do our best to respond to requests for additional meetings."

Under the Obama administration, EPA held four multiday public hearings — in Washington, Atlanta, Pittsburgh and Denver — to collect feedback before issuing the Clean Power Plan in 2015. About two dozen conservative-leaning states and a battery of fossil-fuel companies immediately sued, successfully preventing the carbon reduction plan from taking effect prior to the election of Donald Trump, who as a candidate pledged to repeal it.

A Republican lawyer who previously served as the attorney general of Oklahoma, Pruitt was among those who fought the Clean Power Plan in court. Since his appointment by Trump to lead EPA, he has made the delay and reversal of recent environmental regulations negatively impacting the profits of coal and petrochemical companies a priority.

Though Trump, Pruitt and others have blamed environmental regulations for the loss of coal-mining jobs, many industry insiders concede that it has been the accelerating shift of electric utilities using cheaper and cleaner-burning natural gas that is the primary culprit.

Pruitt has also sought to cast doubt on the consensus of climate scientists that the continued burning of fossil fuels is the main driver of global warming. Scientists say climate change has already triggered rising seas and more extreme weather, including killer heat waves, worsened droughts and torrential rains.

A Government Accountability Office report released earlier this month concluded that the impacts from climate change are already costing the federal government money, and those costs will likely increase over time.

U.S. taxpayers spent more than $350 billion over the last decade on disaster assistance programs and insurance payouts from floods and crop failures. That tally does not include the massive toll from this year's wildfires and three major hurricanes, expected to be among the most costly in the nation's history.

The report predicts these costs will only grow in the future, averaging a budget busting $35 billion each year by 2050 — a figure that recent history would suggest is a conservative estimate.

Bill Price, an organizer for the Sierra Club based in West Virginia, worried that by holding the public hearing where support for both Trump and coal are the strongest, the administration hoped that those opposed to that agenda might be more reticent to speak out.

"There is a concern that the scheduled hearing in West Virginia has all the markings of a sham, that only gives a dying industry a venue to intimidate people," Price said. "It is our hope that the hearing will provide a safe place where all viewpoints can be heard."

Register to comment on the EPA's proposed repeal of the Clean Power Plan:

https://www.epa.gov/stationary-sources-air-pollution/electric-utility-generating-units-repealing-clean-power-plan

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Follow Associated Press environmental writer Michael Biesecker at http://twitter.com/mbieseck

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A series of small earthquakes continue in central Oklahoma

Updated: Nov 2, 2017 - 6:27 PM

HENNESSEY, Okla. (AP) - A series of small to moderate earthquakes continue to strike in central Oklahoma.

The U.S. Geological Survey has recorded about a dozen quakes since Tuesday near Hennessey, about 45 miles (72 kilometers) northwest of Oklahoma City.

The most recent quakes include magnitude 3.4 on Thursday, in addition to a magnitude 4.1 temblor on Tuesday and magnitude 3.4 and 3.5 quakes on Wednesday.

No injury or damage is reported.

Thousands of quakes have struck Oklahoma in recent years, many linked to the underground injection of wastewater from oil and natural gas production. Some oil and gas producers have been directed to close some wells and reduce injection volumes in others.

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News 9 Exclusive: Scott Pruitt Talks About Changes At EPA

Posted: Nov 02, 2017 10:00 PM CDT Updated: Nov 02, 2017 10:00 PM CDT

BY KELLY OGLE, NEWS 9 BIO EMAIL

BY DEANNE STEIN, NEWS 9 BIO EMAIL

WASHINGTON, D.C. - As Oklahoma Attorney General, Scott Pruitt not only vowed to fight crime, but to also fight Washington.

During his term here, he led a crusade against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, now he's running it.

Since taking the helm at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency this year, Scott Pruitt has been dogged by controversy. News 9 sat down with him in his office in Washington, D.C. to find out how he's facing that controversy head-on.

"It's competitive," Pruitt said. "But let's focus on doing our work and doing it the right way."

For Pruitt, doing what's right has meant undoing many of President's Barack Obama's environmental initiatives, like the Clean Power Plan. That plan to reduce carbon emissions is among more than two dozen rules and regulations Pruitt aims to delay or roll back from the Obama era.

"I mean most folks look at the Obama administration and think they were the environmental savior," he said. "What did they actually accomplish, other than declaring a war on a certain part of our economy, fossil fuels?"

During his time in Oklahoma, the former attorney general led the charge against the EPA, claiming the agency exceeded its legal authority by imposing burdensome regulations on the energy industry. Now with President Trump in charge, Pruitt says he intends to right the wrongs of the past.

"Our job is to enforce the law. It's not to make the law," said Pruitt. "It's not to fill a vacuum if Congress doesn't do its job. And if Congress fails to do its job, I can't just go out and do it for them."

Pruitt came here to Washington saying he wanted to provide protection for the environment and freedom once again for American businesses and he has not backed down from his challengers.

"We need to get back into the business of saying we can be both about natural resource management and environmental stewardship, and not having to choose between jobs and environmental protection," he said.

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working to do what he believes the EPA should be doing.

"That was what was so shocking to me when I got here, just the lack of urgency around a c fundamental responsibility that we have to improve air quality, to improve water quality, to s sites remediated, to see sites come off that superfund list," he said.

Recently, Pruitt has been highly criticized for increasing his security staff up to 30 people with 24/7 protection. The EPA Inspector General says Pruitt has received four to five times the number of death threats his predecessor did, and they're currently investigating 70 of them.

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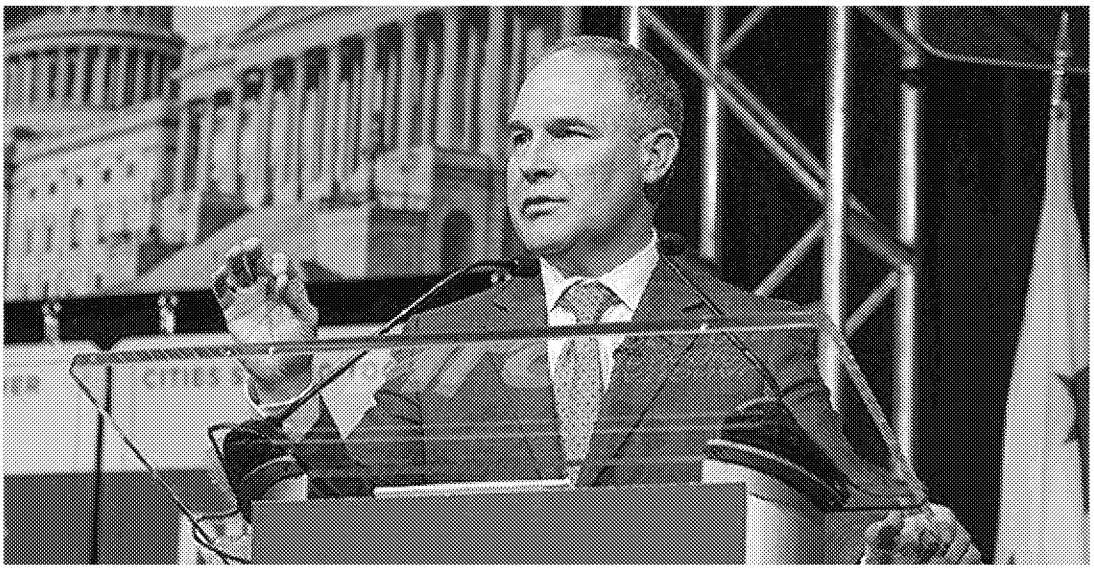
LATE-BREAKING NEWS

EPA

Pruitt grant directive applies to all 22 advisory panels

Sean Reilly, E&E News reporter

Published: Thursday, November 2, 2017



U.S. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt. @EPAScottPruitt/Twitter

This article was updated 5:05 p.m. EDT.

U.S. EPA will apply new membership standards to all of its 22 federal advisory committees, not just three singled out earlier this week, a spokesman confirmed today.

The new policy, which bars current EPA grant recipients from serving on such advisory panels, "is in effect, and right now we're in the process of reviewing all the other boards and speaking with their members so they are in compliance," Michael Abboud said in a phone call this afternoon.

Abboud didn't have a timetable for when members of those other committees — which cover areas such as children's health, human studies and chemical safety — who receive EPA grants must decide between giving up their funding and surrendering their seats.

In announcing the policy Tuesday, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt had singled out just three — the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee (CASAC), the Science Advisory Board (SAB) and the Board of Scientific Counselors (BOSC) — and said affected members had a week to choose (***E&E News PM***, Oct. 31).

Pruitt's directive requires that "no member of an EPA federal advisory committee be currently in receipt of EPA grants, either as principal investigator or co-investigator, or in a position that otherwise would reap substantial direct benefit from an EPA grant."

But the administrator didn't mention any of the other 19 committees during the announcement at EPA headquarters. Agency officials hadn't responded until today to questions about whether he intended to apply the new policy to them as well.

The directive's requirement will similarly affect subcommittees, such as CASAC review panels that assess air quality standards for specific pollutants, Abboud said. Pruitt had referenced the CASAC, SAB and BOSC, he said, because they are the "most prominent" of the 22.

How many members on the remaining 19 will be affected is uncertain. At the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which has denounced the new policy as politically motivated, "we've not had an opportunity to assess all of the funding that will be impacted," Joanne Carney, the group's government relations director, said in an interview this afternoon.

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Attempts to reach the leaders of several advisory committees — including one who had previously thought the new policy did not apply to her panel — were not immediately successful.

The directive, which exempts state, local and tribal government grant recipients, also calls for more "geographic diversity" among committee members and regular rotation of participants, which appears to mean an end to the custom of reappointing first-term members to a second three-year term.

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LATE-BREAKING NEWS

INTERIOR

U.S. quits world effort to combat oil, mining corruption

Dylan Brown, E&E News reporter
Published: Thursday, November 2, 2017

The Trump administration today pulled out of an international initiative to make oil, gas and mining companies disclose their payments to governments as a method to lessen conflict and corruption worldwide.

The U.S. will continue to support but not implement the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative "effective immediately," according to a **letter** today to EITI Chairman Fredrik Reinfeldt from the Interior Department.

"While the U.S. government remains committed to fighting corruption in the extractive industries sector, and the ideals of transparency enshrined in the EITI Principles and the EITI Standard, it is clear that domestic implementation of EITI does not fully account for the U.S. legal framework," wrote Gregory Gould, director of the Office of Natural Resources Revenue.

ONRR is "fully committed" to institutionalizing EITI principles but did not specify which provisions were inconsistent with U.S. law.

The U.S. was one of 52 countries working to implement the standards that mirrored a Securities and Exchange Commission rule based on a Dodd-Frank financial reform provision, which was named after Sen. Ben Cardin (D-Md.) and former Sen. Dick Lugar (R-Ind.).

Congress repealed that rule earlier this year after a fierce lobbying campaign by the American Petroleum Institute and U.S.-based oil companies like Exxon Mobil Corp., whose former top executive Rex Tillerson — now secretary of State — personally lobbied against the requirements (***E&E Daily***, Feb. 1).

Critics said the rule would put U.S. companies at a disadvantage by requiring the disclosure of "project-level" data.

Civil society groups countered that the majority of extraction companies, including Chinese and Russian giants, are already reporting that specific information because they trade on stock exchanges in places with laws based in large part on the SEC rule — the European Union, Canada and Norway.

Earlier this year, Interior tamped down rumors it was withdrawing from EITI, but today it referred all questions to the State Department (***Greenwire***, March 21).

According to the letter, Tillerson's agency will take the lead on maintaining American moral and financial support for EITI.

"The government is suggesting that U.S. laws restrict companies from revealing information, including taxes, but this is not the truth," said Danielle Brian, executive director of the Project On Government Oversight and civil society chairwoman of U.S. EITI. "The government is perpetuating a false narrative created by the oil and gas industries that protect themselves and not the American people."

The Wilderness Society's Chase Huntley added: "This is further evidence of the administration's flabbergasting disregard for the public's right to know how their energy assets are being managed. This should be simple — if the United States is committed to fighting corruption in the extractive industries sector, as Mr. Gould states in his letter, then we should be continuing to participate in this initiative."

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NEW ORLEANS METRO EDUCATION NEWS

Paul Habans Charter unveils the 1st 'green schoolyard' in New Orleans

Updated 8:51 AM;
Posted Nov 2, 3:53 PM

Comment

By Wilborn P. Nobles III, wnobles@nola.com,
NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune

A drum cadence played by student musicians filled the air at Paul Habans Charter School Thursday morning (Nov. 2) as the Algiers school unveiled the city's first ever "green schoolyard."

The schoolyard, which serves 630 students in grades pre-k through 8th at Paul Habans Charter, features a range of play equipment, including a chalkboard wall, monkey bars, log jam climber and slide tower. Crescent City Schools, the school's charter management organization, also partnered with a national nonprofit to develop sustainability

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features, including rain gardens to catch rainfall and reduce the amount of water runoff sent into the city's drainage system.

The schoolyard, located at the 3501 Seine Street campus, is the first in New Orleans to fold sustainability and water management into its design. It adheres to stormwater capture requirements set forth in the city's Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance, which, in part, calls for more ditch gardens to minimize runoff and improve water quality.

City councilwoman Nadine Ramsey of District C, which includes Algiers, lauded the students who collaborated with planners to design their new play space.

"We know that we're going to live with water, and the challenges that we've faced recently have showed us the importance of being able to manage it," Ramsey said, referencing the costly repairs needed to bring the city's aging aging drainage system to full capacity. Several key pumps were not operating during the city's Aug. 5 flood.

Habans built the new yard with help from the Trust for Public Land, a nonprofit that has aided in the creation of parks and playgrounds since 1996. Sarah Olivier, director of the Trust for Public Land's New Orleans office, said the organization raised funds for the first phase of the project through private donors.

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Olivier noted the rain gardens at Habans schoolyard are filled with native plants and vegetation designed to capture the first 1.25 inch of rainfall when it storms. The schoolyard will be open for the community to explore when school is not in session.

District 7 State Sen. Troy Carter, D-Algiers, stressed the importance of teaching youth about environmental sustainability.

"We have to respect the land that we have," Carter said. "We have to respect the environment, and we have to teach our young people the importance of respecting the environment."

A first look at the proposed Paul Habans Charter School playground

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That respect for the environment was evident in 6th-grader Elijah Cueva. He and other students in Habans teacher Thomas DeCarlo's 6th grade class designed the playground. Elijah told attendees at the Thursday unveil that his class talked "for hours" about how they could make the yard useful to all students.

Most students wanted a club house and some students wanted a slide, so Elijah said they combined the two concepts into a slide tower. Figuring out a way to make sure rainwater didn't overwhelm the schoolyard posed the biggest challenge for students.

"The problem with our playground was that when it rained, it always flooded and got muddy," Elijah said. "We needed to make sure we balanced gray and green infrastructure and installed catch basins to improve our water management."

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For the uniniatiated, so-called "gray infrastructure" refers to sewers, tunnels and other man-made ways to catch rainwater runoff.

Long-term plans for the Habans schoolyard call for the addition of a sports field, walking path, outdoor classroom and additional rain gardens to reduce flooding.

Elijah Cueva and other students waited in anticipation Thursday to try out the new schoolyard. Elijah chimed in as soon as a fellow student cut the ribbon.

"Let's go play!" he shouted.

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Wilborn P. Nobles III is an education reporter based in New Orleans. He can be reached at wnobles@nola.com or on Twitter at @WilNobles.

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