Message

From: Fajardo, Juan [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=B0D22B69E0AC4BDBA6C83266D738EBEC-FAJARDO, JUAN]
Sent: 2/22/2022 6:05:25 PM
To: Flanagan, Sarah [Flanagan.Sarah@epa.gov]
Subject: FW: Daily News Clips 2-22-2022

fyi

From: Vaughn, Stephanie <Vaughn.Stephanie@epa.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, February 22, 2022 1:00 PM
To: Sivak, Michael <Sivak.Michael@epa.gov>; Carpenter, Angela <Carpenter.Angela@epa.gov>; Ketu, Rupika <Ketu.Rupika@epa.gov>; Fajardo, Juan <Fajardo.Juan@epa.gov>; Griffiths, Rachel <griffiths.rachel@epa.gov>; Clemetson, Michael <Clemetson.Michael@epa.gov>; Seppi, Pat <Seppi.Pat@epa.gov>
Subject: RE: Daily News Clips 2-22-2022

We are sharing our comments on the draft FS with the performing PRPs on Monday (the 28th) and will ask for a 30-day turnaround (I think), so I would plan to have a revised document to look at first or second week of April.

Rupika and I are finalizing comments on the current draft this week and may have a couple of questions for a few of you…we will likely get those to you later today or tomorrow.

Thanks

From: Sivak, Michael <Sivak.Michael@epa.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, February 22, 2022 12:57 PM
To: Vaughn, Stephanie <Vaughn.Stephanie@epa.gov>; Carpenter, Angela <Carpenter.Angela@epa.gov>; Ketu, Rupika <Ketu.Rupika@epa.gov>; Fajardo, Juan <Fajardo.Juan@epa.gov>; Griffiths, Rachel <griffiths.rachel@epa.gov>; Clemetson, Michael <Clemetson.Michael@epa.gov>; Seppi, Pat <Seppi.Pat@epa.gov>
Subject: RE: Daily News Clips 2-22-2022

Thanks for sharing.

When are you expecting the revised FS in for our review?

Michael Sivak

sivak.michael@epa.gov | 212.637.4310 (desk) | 646.438.5237 (cell)

From: Vaughn, Stephanie <Vaughn.Stephanie@epa.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, February 22, 2022 12:55 PM
To: Carpenter, Angela <Carpenter.Angela@epa.gov>; Ketu, Rupika <Ketu.Rupika@epa.gov>; Fajardo, Juan <Fajardo.Juan@epa.gov>; Sivak, Michael <Sivak.Michael@epa.gov>; Griffiths, Rachel <griffiths.rachel@epa.gov>; Clemetson, Michael <Clemetson.Michael@epa.gov>; Seppi, Pat <Seppi.Pat@epa.gov>
Subject: FW: Daily News Clips 2-22-2022

FYI – article on Rolling Knolls, 4th one down.

From: McIntosh, Tracy <McIntosh.Tracy@epa.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, February 22, 2022 11:40 AM
To: McIntosh, Tracy <McIntosh.Tracy@epa.gov>
Subject: Daily News Clips 2-22-2022

REGION 2 SOCIAL MEDIA

Twitter – **14.8k followers**

Facebook – **15.6k followers**

REGION 2 NEWS

Bloomberg Law: Environmental Cops Eye Return to Obama-Level Criminal Case Rates; February 22, 2022,by Stephen Lee

The Justice Department's push to prioritize criminal prosecutions for environmental crimes seeks to return the agency to pre-Trump administration enforcement levels, but not to dramatically exceed them.

Elnuevodia.com: Environmental organizations demand the closure of the AES plant; February 21, 2022 ,by Leysa Caro Gonzalez

Environmental organizations demanded today, Monday, in a demonstration in front of La Fortaleza , the immediate cessation of the operations of the AES Puerto Rico plant , in Guayama, "due to the high cost to the health and life of the families" that have been exposed to "the toxicity of plant operations", which generates energy by burning coal.

La Perla Del Sur: They call a demonstration in Fortaleza against the rescue of the coal company AES; February 16,2022,by Victor Alvarado Guzman

Various organizations called for a demonstration in front of Fortaleza on February 21 at 10:00 am to express their rejection of the economic rescue proposed by the company AES Puerto Rico, which would include transferring ownership of the controversial power plant to the government. coal established in Guayama.

The Daily Recorder: Citizen group presses EPA for aggressive cleanup of toxic Superfund landfill in Chatham; February 18, 2022, by William Westhoven

As federal officials near a final decision about the remediation of a toxic Superfund site in Chatham Township, members of the Rolling Knolls Landfill Superfund Community Action Group are pressing the Environmental Protection Agency to choose an aggressive cleanup plan that would allow the public to access the land for passive recreation.

The New York Times : The C.D.C. Isn't Publishing Large Portions of the Covid Data It Collects; February 20, 2022, by Apoorva Mandavill

For more than a year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has collected data on hospitalizations for Covid-19 in the United States and broken it down by age, race and vaccination status. But it has not made most of the information public.

The Wall Street Journal: Burning Electric-Vehicle Batteries Complicate Efforts to Fight Fire on Drifting Ship in Atlantic Ocean; February 20, 2022, by William Boston and Patrica Kowsmann

The large number of electric vehicles on board a ship that is drifting ablaze in the Atlantic Ocean is complicating efforts to extinguish the fire, the Dutch experts contracted to salvage the vessel said Sunday.

The Virgin Island Consortium: Limetree Bay Terminals Announces New CEO Following Departure of Jeffrey Rinker; February 18, 2022, by Staff

Limetree Bay Terminals on Friday announced that Todd Dillabough has been appointed chief executive officer of the company, effective February 17. Mr. Dillabough succeeds Jeffrey Rinker, who left the Limetree Bay in January.

NATIONAL

***See attached email**

FULL ARTICLES

REGION 2

Bloomberg law

https://news.bloomberglaw.com/environment-and-energy/environmental-cops-eye-return-to-obama-level-criminal-case-rates

Environmental Cops Eye Return to Obama-Level Criminal Case Rates

February 22, 2022

Stephen Lee

The Justice Department's push to prioritize criminal prosecutions for environmental crimes seeks to return the agency to pre-Trump administration enforcement levels, but not to dramatically exceed them.

That clarification from Justice Department officials sheds light on recent public remarks by Todd Kim, assistant attorney general for Justice's Environment and Natural Resources Division (ENRD), who said his group "will prioritize prosecuting individuals who commit and profit from corporate malfeasance."

Justice wants to reverse a sharp decline in criminal prosecutions during the Trump administration, a senior ENRD official who specializes in environmental crimes, and who spoke on condition of anonymity, told Bloomberg Law.

The number of environmental criminal prosecutions never topped 100 per fiscal year under President Donald Trump, after averaging well over 100 during the Obama administration, according to Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse.

The department's position suggests that, in at least some cases, "environmental misdemeanor cases that were either not pursued at all, or were instead pursued through civil enforcement, will now be investigated as crimes, particularly if they have a nexus with environmental justice communities," said Matt Leopold, a former EPA general counsel under Trump.

Personnel Issues

To demonstrate that ENRD isn't going to ramp up criminal prosecutions to previously unforeseen levels, the Justice official noted that the environmental crimes section hasn't gotten any new resources of late and only has 36 attorneys, putting limits on how many criminal cases the department can push forward.

The environmental crimes section has seen a 15% reduction in staff since January 2017, although the division has been granted authority to hire two more employees.

Personnel is an issue at the Environmental Protection Agency, too—an important factor because most environmental investigations at Justice are triggered by EPA referrals. Rod Rosenstein, the former deputy attorney general under Trump, said the primary way to develop more cases is to "increase the resources devoted to that area."

But the EPA's Criminal Investigation Division only has some 160 investigators, and hasn't had its full statutory complement of 200 in at least the last decade, the Justice official said.

Wyn Hornbuckle, a Justice spokesman, said ENRD will "continue to pursue criminal prosecution where the facts and evidence of a crime can be proven in court beyond a reasonable doubt, for both individuals and corporations who may be culpable."

Larger Cases

Under Trump, the Justice Department said its numbers were down in part because it was focusing on larger, more complex cases. Any increase in cases isn't likely to be seen for several months at least, given how long it takes to investigate and prosecute cases, according to Leopold, now a partner with Hunton Andrews Kurth LLP.

In the immediate future, Justice's criminal division is likely to focus on Clean Air Act cases, which have the potential to bend the curve on climate change, in line with the Biden administration's goals, according to the Justice official. Other types of cases, including Clean Water Act cases, haven't been referred to Justice as often, he said.

Managers and executives further down a company's supply chain will also be a focus of criminal prosecution, according to Todd Mikolop, a former ENRD trial attorney and now counsel at Hunton Andrews Kurth LLP. Kim said in his remarks that companies seeking credit for cooperation "will need to identify all individuals involved in misconduct."

Another possible result of the push for more criminal prosecutions is tougher scrutiny of facilities in low-income communities of color, according to Steve Solow, former chief of Justice's environmental crimes section and now a Baker Botts LLP partner.

Solow envisions prosecutors seeking input from environmental justice communities to identify concerns that could lead to investigations, or canvassing for information to help them decide whether to prosecute.

In the meantime, the department is working on a comprehensive environmental justice plan. Hornbuckle said ENRD focuses on "the most egregious and harmful conduct endangering public health and the environment, including in underserved communities who have born a disproportionate burden from pollution."

A Long-Standing Goal

Broadly, the goal of pursuing individual criminal prosecutions is a long-standing Justice Department priority that makes sense because it ensures the government isn't penalizing the wrong people, such as employees or shareholders who had nothing to do with the wrongdoing, said Rosenstein, now a partner at King & Spalding LLP.

Peter Hsiao, a former senior trial lawyer at Justice, agreed, saying criminal prosecution "is a very potent weapon to create the deterrence effect that will bring large-scale compliance."

Environmental prosecutions tend also to be popular with the public, said Hsiao, now a King & Spalding LLP partner. That could give the Biden administration added incentive to aggressively pursue corporate polluters.

But the department will have to be careful not to go too far, because overly zealous prosecutions could trigger criticisms that the administration is hurting U.S. competitiveness.

That concern has occurred to Richard Glaze, a former special assistant U.S. attorney and former EPA senior enforcement counsel, who warned about the possibility of overcriminalization because the difference between a civil and criminal case is so small.

"It's a matter of mental state, and the mental state that's required to be proven for a criminal case is a very low bar for the government," said Glaze, now a partner at Barnes & Thornburg LLP.

Glaze also said, however, that he doesn't believe that ENRD has an "institutional predisposition toward overcriminalization." That view was confirmed by a senior Justice official, who said the agency must stick to long-established principles of federal prosecution.

Willing Partner at EPA

The Biden EPA has already started toughening up.

In fiscal 2021, the agency opened 123 new cases, and an individual defendant was prosecuted in 88% of the criminal cases charged.

Kim appears to have a willing partner at the EPA if the Senate confirms David Uhlmann, the Biden administration's pick to lead the agency's enforcement branch, who vowed in his confirmation hearing to crack down on violators.

His confirmation has stalled in the Senate by a blanket hold on EPA nominations from Sens. Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.) and Bill Cassidy (R-La.).

Elnuevodia.com

https://www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/locales/notas/organizaciones-ambientales-exigen-el-cierre-de-la-planta-de-aes/

Environmental organizations demand the closure of the AES plant

February 21, 2022

Leysa Caro Gonzalez

Environmental organizations demanded today, Monday, in a demonstration in front of La Fortaleza , the immediate cessation of the operations of the AES Puerto Rico plant , in Guayama, "due to the high cost to the health and life of the families" that have been exposed to "the toxicity of plant operations", which generates energy by burning coal.

In a letter that they read in front of the Executive Mansion, the group also demanded that Governor Pedro Pierluisi not respond to the alleged financial rescue that the company requested from the government after facing fiscal problems.

"It seems to us cheeky that this company, after it has poisoned us, wants the government to bail them out. We demand that the governor clearly say that he is not going to respond , "said **Víctor Alvarado** , of the Environmental Dialogue Committee.

AES, for its part, denied that it had requested any type of financial rescue. **"AES Puerto Rico has not requested any type of financial rescue. We have clearly, publicly and openly stated, including through various media, our willingness to collaborate with the energy transition of Puerto Rico,"** the company stated in writing.

An article published in the weekly newspaper La Perla del Sur , supported by official documents, revealed that since June the company has tried to pass ownership of the plant to the Electric Power Authority (PREPA) and that its new contract be based on operator of installation.

"It would be cheeky to have an economic rescue with public money for a company that has polluted the South Aquifer ," said **Hernaliz Vázquez,** spokesperson for the Sierra Club Puerto Rico.

In the letter, they also demand that the company be investigated and two legislative measures be approved that would prohibit the use of coal as a source of power generation as of this year.

"Accepting AES's leonine proposals perpetuates the energy poverty that our communities experience daily ," said Vázquez, adding that they will continue to carry out actions aimed at the government rejecting AES's proposals.

La Perla Del Sur

https://www.periodicolaperla.com/convocan-a-manifestacion-en-fortaleza-contra-el-rescate-a-la-carbonera-aes/

They call a demonstration in Fortaleza against the rescue of the coal company AES

February 16,2022

Victor Alvarado Guzman

Various organizations called for a demonstration in front of Fortaleza on February 21 at 10:00 am to express their rejection of the economic rescue proposed by the company AES Puerto Rico, which would include transferring ownership of the controversial power plant to the government. coal established in Guayama.

In addition to the transfer of its facilities, the president of AES, Jesús Bolinaga Serfaty, proposed that the Electric Power Authority (PREPA) grant it a new contract, this time only as "operator" of the plant, and that the Government of Puerto Rico bear all of your expenses, including the purchase of coal and more than $150 million in environmental costs. As part of the proposed rescue, PREPA is currently negotiating another million-dollar contract with AES, to generate energy with fossil gas, misnamed natural gas, or a solar park with industrial batteries.

The activity called by the organizations has the objective of demanding that Governor Pedro Pierluisi Urrutia reject the rescue of AES, begin the definitive closure of the coal plant, and force the coal company to assume its responsibility for the terrible damage to the environment. and to health, and that he is not awarded one more contract. In addition, the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources must be ordered to monitor the land and aquifers where the AES discarded over 2 million tons of toxic ash, between 2004 and 2017.

Two weeks ago, activists went to the PREPA headquarters to deliver a letter to the executive director, Josué Colón Ortiz, and to the president of the Governing Board of the public corporation, Fernando Gil-Enseñat, demanding that the proposal be publicly rejected. from AES. Initially, both refused to receive the letter, but after four hours, where the protesters closed three entrances to the building and Juan Ponce de León Avenue, they agreed to receive them.

The coordinators of the activity made a call to participate in the demonstration and to express in various ways the rejection of the AES company and its proposed financial rescue.

The organizations that convene this activity are: Camp against the ashes in Peñuelas, Sierra Club, Climate Action Now, Friends of the Sea, Environmental Dialogue Committee, Toabajeños in Defense of the Environment, Somos Sur, Cuatro Costas, Puerto Rican Independence Party, Zero Basura Arecibo , Coalition of Anti-Incineration Organizations.

The Daily Recorder
https://www.dailyrecord.com/story/news/2022/02/18/chatham-township-nj-superfund-site-epa-cleanup/6811179001/

Citizen group presses EPA for aggressive cleanup of toxic Superfund landfill in Chatham

February 18, 2022

William Westhoven

As federal officials near a final decision about the remediation of a toxic Superfund site in Chatham Township, members of the Rolling Knolls Landfill Superfund Community Action Group are pressing the Environmental Protection Agency to choose an aggressive cleanup plan that would allow the public to access the land for passive recreation.

Complicating matters is a mix of private and public ownership of the 170-acre Rolling Knolls site, much of which operated as a landfill until 1968. The EPA placed the site on the Superfund program's National Priorities List in September 2003.

Most of it is owned by the private family Miele Trust. About 35 acres are owned by the Department of the Interior and reside within the 7,700-acre Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Green Village Fire Department owns the northeastern portion.

EPA remediation options range from no action to excavating and cleaning the landfill area, estimated at a cost of $55.4 million.

Sally Rubin of the nonprofit Great Swamp Watershed Association, who took a lead role in an online CAG meeting Tuesday, said the EPA seems to be operating under the assumption that the Miele Trust land would remain privately owned and therefore would not be publicly accessible.

Less foot traffic would allow the EPA to choose a less aggressive, less-expensive remediation plan.

But representatives of Chatham Township, the Great Swamp and the Miele Trust met in July to draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that all of the land should ultimately be open "for wildlife conservation and year-round passive recreation."

That would require the township or U.S. Fish and Wildlife to take ownership of the 135-acre Miele tract. But neither entity is willing to do so "unless it was cleaned up to a different standard than the EPA has proposed until now," Rubin said.

Juan Fajardo, representing the EPA on the meeting, said he would like to hear from the property owners. Rubin reminded him the Miele Trust owned the land and signed the MOU, "so I would presume to say they are in support of what it contains."

Rubin agreed to set up a meeting of the MOU partners, including the Miele Trust, and the EPA to discuss the property owners' intentions for the land.

Fajardo said the EPA was aware of the MOU and would consider it and other public comments before issuing its preferred remedy.

"That's a great non-answer," Rubin said.

The EPA is expected to issue its preferred remedy by the summer of 2023. Prior to that deadline, the EPA will release its final feasibility study and solicit comments from the public.

Another group of business entities, identified by the EPA as Possible Responsible Parties responsible for remediation costs, has formally objected to the MOU.

Attorneys for the group, which includes Chevron Environmental Management Company, Nokia of America and Novartis Pharmaceuticals, wrote a letter to the CAG claiming the MOU "constitutes a tortious interference with the group's settlement agreement and release and restrictive covenant with the Miele Trust."

The CAG will meet again on March 29.

New Jersey has the most Superfund sites of any state, 114 as of Feb. 1 identified by the Environmental Protection Agency as contaminated with hazardous substances that threaten public health or the environment. Morris County has 10 of those sites, more than 12 states.

Nationwide, approximately $4.7 billion has been spent on Superfund site investigations and cleanups. Most of the money comes from a special account funded by settlement payments with "potentially responsible parties" believed to have caused the contamination.

More than $8.2 billion has been made available in special accounts through the deposit of funds from PRP settlements the EPA said.

The New York Times
https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/health/covid-cdc-data.html

The C.D.C. Isn't Publishing Large Portions of the Covid Data It Collects

February 20, 2022

Apoorva Mandavill

For more than a year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has collected data on hospitalizations for Covid-19 in the United States and broken it down by age, race and vaccination status. But it has not made most of the information public.

When the C.D.C. published the first significant data on the effectiveness of boosters in adults younger than 65 two weeks ago, it left out the numbers for a huge portion of that population: 18- to 49-year-olds, the group least likely to benefit from extra shots, because the first two doses already left them well-protected.

The agency recently debuted a dashboard of wastewater data on its website that will be updated daily and might provide early signals of an oncoming surge of Covid cases. Some states and localities had been sharing wastewater information with the agency since the start of the pandemic, but it had never before released those findings.

Two full years into the pandemic, the agency leading the country's response to the public health emergency has published only a tiny fraction of the data it has collected, several people familiar with the data said.

Much of the withheld information could help state and local health officials better target their efforts to bring the virus under control. Detailed, timely data on hospitalizations by age and race would help health officials identify and help the populations at highest risk. Information on hospitalizations and death by age and vaccination status would have helped inform whether healthy adults needed booster shots. And wastewater surveillance across the nation would spot outbreaks and emerging variants early.

Without the booster data for 18- to 49-year-olds, the outside experts whom federal health agencies look to for advice had to rely on numbers from Israel to make their recommendations on the shots.

Kristen Nordlund, a spokeswoman for the C.D.C., said the agency has been slow to release the different streams of data "because basically, at the end of the day, it's not yet ready for prime time." She said the agency's "priority when gathering any data is to ensure that it's accurate and actionable."

Another reason is fear that the information might be misinterpreted, Ms. Nordlund said.

Dr. Daniel Jernigan, the agency's deputy director for public health science and surveillance said the pandemic exposed the fact that data systems at the C.D.C., and at the state levels, are outmoded and not up to handling large volumes of data. C.D.C. scientists are trying to modernize the systems, he said.

"We want better, faster data that can lead to decision making and actions at all levels of public health, that can help us eliminate the lag in data that has held us back," he added.

The C.D.C. also has multiple bureaucratic divisions that must sign off on important publications, and its officials must alert the Department of Health and Human Services — which oversees the agency — and the White House of their plans. The agency often shares data with states and partners before making data public. Those steps can add delays.

"The C.D.C. is a political organization as much as it is a public health organization," said Samuel Scarpino, managing director of pathogen surveillance at the Rockefeller Foundation's Pandemic Prevention Institute. "The steps that it takes to get something like this released are often well outside of the control of many of the scientists that work at the C.D.C."

The performance of vaccines and boosters, particularly in younger adults, is among the most glaring omissions in data the C.D.C. has made public.

Last year, the agency repeatedly came under fire for not tracking so-called breakthrough infections in vaccinated Americans, and focusing only on individuals who became ill enough to be hospitalized or die. The agency presented that information as risk comparisons with unvaccinated adults, rather than provide timely snapshots of hospitalized patients stratified by age, sex, race and vaccination status.

But the C.D.C. has been routinely collecting information since the Covid vaccines were first rolled out last year, according to a federal official familiar with the effort. The agency has been reluctant to make those figures public, the official said, because they might be misinterpreted as the vaccines being ineffective.

Ms. Nordlund confirmed that as one of the reasons. Another reason, she said, is that the data represents only 10 percent of the population of the United States. But the C.D.C. has relied on the same level of sampling to track influenza for years.
Some outside public health experts were stunned to hear that information exists.

"We have been begging for that sort of granularity of data for two years," said Jessica Malaty Rivera, an epidemiologist and part of the team that ran Covid Tracking Project, an independent effort that compiled data on the pandemic till March 2021.

A detailed analysis, she said, "builds public trust, and it paints a much clearer picture of what's actually going on."

Concern about the misinterpretation of hospitalization data broken down by vaccination status is not unique to the C.D.C. On Thursday, public health officials in Scotland said they would stop releasing data on Covid hospitalizations and deaths by vaccination status because of similar fears that the figures would be misrepresented by anti-vaccine groups.

But the experts dismissed the potential misuse or misinterpretation of data as an acceptable reason for not releasing it.

"We are at a much greater risk of misinterpreting the data with data vacuums, than sharing the data with proper science, communication and caveats," Ms. Rivera said.

When the Delta variant caused an outbreak in Massachusetts last summer, the fact that three-quarters of those infected were vaccinated led people to mistakenly conclude that the vaccines were powerless against the virus — validating the C.D.C.'s concerns.

But that could have been avoided if the agency had educated the public from the start that as more people are vaccinated, the percentage of vaccinated people who are infected or hospitalized would also rise, public health experts said.

"Tell the truth, present the data," said Dr. Paul Offit, a vaccine expert and adviser to the Food and Drug Administration. "I have to believe that there is a way to explain these things so people can understand it."

Knowing which groups of people were being hospitalized in the United States, which other conditions those patients may have had and how vaccines changed the picture over time would have been invaluable, Dr. Offit said.

Relying on Israeli data to make booster recommendations for Americans was less than ideal, Dr. Offit noted. Israel defines severe disease differently than the United States, among other factors.

"There's no reason that they should be better at collecting and putting forth data than we were," Dr. Offit said of Israeli scientists. "The C.D.C. is the principal epidemiological agency in this country, and so you would like to think the data came from them."

It has also been difficult to find C.D.C. data on the proportion of children hospitalized for Covid who have other medical conditions, said Dr. Yvonne Maldonado, chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics's Committee on Infectious Diseases.

The academy's staff asked their partners at the C.D.C. for that information on a call in December, according to a spokeswoman for the A.A.P., and were told it was unavailable.

The pediatrics academy has repeatedly asked the C.D.C. for an estimate on the contagiousness of a person infected with the coronavirus five days after symptoms begin — but Dr. Maldonado finally got the answer from an article in The New York Times in December.

"They've known this for over a year and a half, right, and they haven't told us," she said. "I mean, you can't find out anything from them."

Experts in wastewater analysis were more understanding of the C.D.C.'s slow pace of making that data public. The C.D.C. has been building the wastewater system since September 2020, and the capacity to present the data over the past few months, Ms. Nordlund said. In the meantime, the C.D.C.'s state partners have had access to the data, she said.

Despite the cautious preparation, the C.D.C. released the wastewater data a week later than planned. The Covid Data Tracker is updated only on Thursdays, and the day before the original release date, the scientists who manage the tracker realized they needed more time to integrate the data.

"It wasn't because the data wasn't ready, it was because the systems and how it physically displayed on the page wasn't working the way that they wanted it to," Ms. Nordlund said.

The C.D.C. has received more than $1 billion to modernize its systems, which may help pick up the pace, Ms. Nordlund said. "We're working on that," she said.

The agency's public dashboard now has data from 31 states. Eight of those states, including Utah, began sending their figures to the C.D.C. in the fall of 2020. Some relied on scientists volunteering their expertise; others paid private companies. But many others, such as Mississippi, New Mexico and North Dakota, have yet to begin tracking wastewater.

Utah's fledgling program in April 2020 has now grown to cover 88 percent of the state's population, with samples being collected twice a week, according to Nathan LaCross, who manages Utah's wastewater surveillance program.

Wastewater data reflects the presence of the virus in an entire community, so it is not plagued by the privacy concerns attached to medical information that would normally complicate data release, experts said.

"There are a bunch of very important and substantive legal and ethical challenges that don't exist for wastewater data," Dr. Scarpino said. "That lowered bar should certainly mean that data could flow faster."

Tracking wastewater can help identify areas experiencing a high burden of cases early, Dr. LaCross said. That allows officials to better allocate resources like mobile testing teams and testing sites.

Wastewater is also a much faster and more reliable barometer of the spread of the virus than the number of cases or positive tests. Well before the nation became aware of the Delta variant, for example, scientists who track wastewater had seen its rise and alerted the C.D.C., Dr. Scarpino said. They did so in early May, just before the agency famously said vaccinated people could take off their masks.

Even now, the agency is relying on a technique that captures the amount of virus, but not the different variants in the mix, said Mariana Matus, chief executive officer of BioBot Analytics, which specializes in wastewater analysis. That will make it difficult for the agency to spot and respond to outbreaks of new variants in a timely manner, she said.

"It gets really exhausting when you see the private sector working faster than the premier public health agency of the world," Ms. Rivera said.

The Wall Street Journal

https://www.wsj.com/articles/burning-electric-vehicle-batteries-complicate-efforts-to-fight-fire-on-drifting-ship-in-atlantic-ocean-11645385571?mod=mhp

Burning Electric-Vehicle Batteries Complicate Efforts to Fight Fire on Drifting Ship in Atlantic Ocean

February 20, 2022

William Boston and Patrica Kowsmann

The large number of electric vehicles on board a ship that is drifting ablaze in the Atlantic Ocean is complicating efforts to extinguish the fire, the Dutch experts contracted to salvage the vessel said Sunday.

It is unclear whether the blaze was caused by the electric cars, whose lithium-ion batteries have been known to catch fire, but the presence of burning batteries on board means SMIT Salvage, the company contracted to rescue the ship, is facing fire that spreads fast and cannot be fought with water alone, the company's owners said.

"The cars are electric and part of the fire is the batteries that are still burning," said a spokesman for Royal Boskalis Westminster NV, which owns SMIT Salvage and the company that freed the ship Ever Given after it became stranded in the Suez Canal last year.

The spokesman added that it was too early to say how SMIT would put out the battery fires.

The 60,000-ton Felicity Ace merchant ship was carrying around 4,000 cars from Germany to the U.S., including 1,100 Porsche sports cars and 189 super-luxury Bentleys, which are all units of Volkswagen AG, when it caught fire last Wednesday, leading to the evacuation of the 22 crew members. It has been drifting just off the Azores islands since.

The fire is the latest in a string of supply-chain setbacks to befall an auto industry that has faced production bottlenecks due to a shortage of components and Covid-19-related disruptions to international-trade routes. Although it will be months before the cause of the fire is known, the blaze on the Felicity Ace, one of the first major fires during a transport of electric vehicles, also raises questions about how to safely transport such vehicles in the future.

The fire on the Felicity Ace led to the evacuation of the 22 crew members. The ship has been drifting just off the Azores.

PHOTO: MARINHA PORTUGUESA

For days, spokesmen for the car makers have declined to provide details to the public about the models on board the ship, but Portuguese navy officials monitoring the vessel and salvage workers fighting the blaze say based on cargo lists they have it is clear that many of the cars on board are electric vehicles.

VW and its brands export electric models such as Porsche's Taycan, Audi's e-tron, and VW's ID.4 from Germany for sale in the U.S.

"The fire continues to be active, although it has diminished in intensity," said João Manuel Mendes Cabeças, captain of the nearest port on the island of Faial in the Azores. "The expectation is that everything or almost everything burned."

Over the weekend, SMIT Salvage piloted its Phor B tug boat to douse the sides of the boat with water as smoke continued to billow out of the decks high above. Footage of the scene showed the hull was bruised and scarred from the heat inside.

The Portuguese navy isn't directly involved in efforts to quell the fire but is monitoring the ship at sea for signs of instability and leakage.

Capt. Cabeças, who is coordinating the navy's operation, told The Wall Street Journal that he spoke to the ship's captain when he arrived on shore after the crew was rescued by the Portuguese air force.

According to the ship captain's initial statements to Capt. Cabeças, alarms alerted the crew Wednesday morning to a fire on Deck 1, just above the main deck. Crew members rushed to Deck 1 but smoke prevented them from entering the cargo hold, Capt. Cabeças said. This prompted the captain to abandon the ship.

The ship's captain couldn't be reached for comment.

Among several commercial ships that came to assist the Felicity Ace was the Resilient Warrior, a Liberia-flagged 81,817-ton oil tanker, that was en route from Ingleside, Texas, to Rotterdam, Netherlands, according to a vessel-tracking site. The tanker took crew members on board to await rescue by the Portuguese air force.

The air force posted a video of the rescue operation on YouTube, showing its EH-101 Merlin helicopter lifting the Felicity Ace crew members off the deck into the aircraft. They were removed from the Resilient Warrior in two groups of 11 and taken to the island of Faial.

The Boskalis spokesman said that the Alp Guard, the first of two oceangoing tug boats en route to the area was in Portuguese water and a second called Bear, was departing from Rotterdam. Later in the week, a SMIT helicopter was due from France that the spokesman said would enable the firefighters to board the ship once conditions were stable.

"We're hoping to go on board in the course of the week," he said. "Once we're on board we can start locating and extinguishing the hot spots."

When the fire is extinguished, the Alp Guard and the Bear will tow the Felicity Ace to a safe harbor, the spokesman said.

The Virgin Island Consortium

https://viconsortium.com/vi-business/virgin-islands-limetree-bay-terminals-announces-new-ceo-following-departure-of-jeffrey-rinker-

Limetree Bay Terminals Announces New CEO Following Departure of Jeffrey Rinker

February 18, 2022

Staff

Limetree Bay Terminals on Friday announced that Todd Dillabough has been appointed chief executive officer of the company, effective February 17. Mr. Dillabough succeeds Jeffrey Rinker, who left the Limetree Bay in January.

The announcement is the most significant development at the refinery and terminal facility since West Indies Petroleum won the bankruptcy auction in January.

According to the release, Mr. Dillabough has more than 40 years of experience in the energy industry, including 15 years of operational and financial restructuring leadership in large, complex, domestic, and international companies. His primary focus has been energy, with both Exploration and Production (E&P) and Oilfield Services as well as Mining, Technology, Pulp & Paper, Aircraft MRO and Airlines.

Mr. Dillabough led two E&P energy companies as CEO, president and COO after moving through the technical side of the E&P business then into business development roles. He most recently served as a principal at DC Cayman, Ltd. Mr. Dillabough earned a bachelor of science in geology from the University of Calgary, in Canada.

"I am very pleased to be working with Limetree Bay and believe that recent steps position the Terminal as a great standalone quality asset in St. Croix, the USVI, and the Caribbean," said Mr. Dillabough. "I expect Limetree Bay Terminals to become the premier merchant energy terminal in the Caribbean serving worldwide customers in dynamic energy markets."

Very Respectfully,

Tracy McIntosh
Public Information Officer
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 2
Public Affairs Office
290 Broadway – 26th Floor
New York, NY 1000
Mcintosh.Tracy@epa.gov
212-637-3633