The Daily News Digest

Friday, October 08, 2010

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DAILY NEWS DIGEST ARTICLES
October 8, 2010

Section I: Region 6 Air Quality

EPA Proposes Stringent Pollution Controls For Coal-Fired Power Plant in New Mexico
BNA's Daily Environment, 10/08/10
Summary: The Environmental Protection Agency proposed Oct. 6 to require the most stringent pollution-control technology available for the coal-fired Four Corners Power Plant in northwest New Mexico, in a bid to reduce nitrogen oxide emissions by 36,000 tons annually from the nation's largest source of the pollutant. The agency said it seeks installation of best available retrofit technology under the Clean Air Act regional haze rule, which orders older coal-fired power plants to reduce atmospheric haze and improve visibility. The Four Corners plant, near Farmington, N.M., is 45 years old. The proposal goes to a 60-day public comment period. Two hearings are to take place in the Four Corners area, EPA said in a statement announcing the proposed rulemaking.

Speakers at meeting slam state environmental agency's effectiveness
Corpus Christi Caller, 10/08/10
Summary: Residents criticized the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, saying it holds too much power and ignores public concerns in the interest of business. None of the 20 residents who spoke Thursday praised the agency during a meeting to get public opinion about the agency's effectiveness. About 200 people, including more than 50 Del Mar College students who attended in conjunction with their courses, participated in the meeting, about the agency's upcoming review by the state's Sunset Commission, which is required by state law and seeks to identify and reduce waste, duplication of efforts and inefficiency. Tom Thomas, a teacher, said that he is distrustful of the commissioners of the agency.

Cap-and-trade plans meet up with greenhouse gas skeptics
Stateline.org, 10/08/10
Summary: A few weeks from now, on November 2, New Mexico's Environmental Improvement Board is scheduled to vote on proposed regulations setting in motion a cap-and-trade program for greenhouse gases. It is likely to approve them. That same day, voters will elect a new governor. She will object to the whole idea

Top 10 Dirtiest US Cities; Smog may add to diabetes risk
The Progress Report, 10/07/10
Summary: From the America Lung Association State of the Air Report 2010, here are the ten cities with the highest levels of ozone, number 1 being the worst -- with any other rankings they scored for particle pollution. #7 Houston-Baytown-Huntsville, TX Ranked 16th for year round particle pollution. Researchers from Children's Hospital Boston found a strong correlation between adult diabetes and particulate air pollution. The research is published in the journal Diabetes Care. The correlation persists even after adjustment for other risk factors, including obesity and ethnicity, says study author John Brownstein, assistant professor at Children's Hospital Boston.

Section II: Hydraulic Fracturing

Texas acts on flaming faucets in Montague County
WFAA, 10/06/10
Summary: Stephen Brock's kitchen faucet burped so much flammable gas back in July, he feared his Montague County home might blow up. When he held a lighter under the faucet, a plume of flame shot out. "It totally enveloped the whole sink," he said. "I jumped back and turned the water off, then I called the Railroad Commission right away." That's the agency that oversees oil and gas drilling in Texas. "The Railroad Commission guy told me it's coming through my well, coming up through my water well," Brock told us in July.

Section III: Oil/Natural Gas

Hard Truths on the Spill - Editorial

NY Times, 10/07/10

Summary: In May, President Obama asked a blue-ribbon commission to determine the causes of the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, find out "what worked and didn't" in the government's response and identify ways to make drilling safer. He asked for frank talk, and he's getting it. On Wednesday, the commission released four preliminary staff reports. One said, sensibly, that we need to know more about spill response in Arctic waters before drilling can proceed off Alaska; the other said that coordination among federal, state and local governments must be improved.

Flashing warning lights on Deepwater Horizon were 'a lot to take in,' safety systems worker testifies

NOLA Times-Picayune, 10/07/10

Summary: In the final moments before the Deepwater Horizon exploded April 20 killing 11 men, the worker who monitored the oil rig's safety systems said she failed to immediately sound alarms when indicator lights warned her of the highest danger. In testimony before a federal investigative panel in Metairie late Tuesday, Andrea Fleytas said she felt the rig jolt that evening and saw more than 10 magenta lights flash on her screen notifying her that the highest level of combustible gas had entered the rig's shaker house and drill shack, critical areas where the rig's drilling team was at work.

Oyster harvester trying to find his footing 5 months after Gulf oil spill

NOLA Times-Picayune, 10/07/10

Summary: For more than 70 days this summer, Bernard Picone's life was reduced to a 12-foot-by-16-foot existence aboard his sturdy steel oyster boat, the Capt. Ethan. After the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, his contract job cleaning oil and hauling boom in Barataria Bay put him across the Mississippi River and miles away from his home in Phoenix, a tiny enclave on Plaquemines Parish's east bank. So he and three deckhands simply stayed on the boat full-time, sometimes anchoring in the passes off Grand Isle, occasionally retreating to Empire or Lafitte during rough weather.

Corexit Use Still Appears to Be Prevalent in the Gulf, Despite Official Statements

Huffington Post, 10/06/10

Summary: Since the blown-out well at the Mississippi Canyon 252 Macondo site has been capped and the cleanup operations in the Gulf declared a success, BP has summarily fired thousands of workers without notice who were left unemployed as a result of the disaster. Local, state and federal agencies have been working to present a picture of normalcy, declaring the seafood safe to eat, the beaches clean and the water free from oil. The actual situation along the Gulf Coast is far from normal, with many people evacuating due to sickness and financial distress. Independent scientific reports continue to conclude the safety of the seafood is questionable at best, the beaches remain thoroughly contaminated, and the majority of the oil and dispersant is still in the water column or at the bottom of the Gulf.

Section IV: Other News

Environment Chief Caught in the Campaign Crossfire

Wall Street Journal, 10/08/10

Summary: Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson isn't on any ballots this November. But in some parts of the country, she might as well be. Ms. Jackson's agency is becoming a foil for congressional candidates across the country. In South Dakota, Republican Kristi Noem has called for Ms. Jackson's resignation, citing the EPA's inaction on a request from ethanol producers to allow more ethanol in gasoline. In Arkansas, embattled Democratic Sen. Blanche Lincoln is blasting Ms. Jackson's agency for promulgating "overreaching, burdensome" regulations on pesticides used by farmers.

Frisco battery recycling plant to test residents' blood levels for lead

Dallas Morning News, 10/08/10

Summary: Frisco's city manager said Thursday that a battery recycling plant in the city's center would soon start testing residents' blood for lead. The decades-old plant operated by Exide Technologies Inc., which crushes and recycles used automotive and industrial batteries, has some of the highest lead emissions in the south-central United States. Lead can be toxic even in minute amounts and can cause health problems, including brain damage, learning disabilities and behavioral issues. Details about the blood testing program, a joint effort between the company and the city, are still being worked out.

Blood lead poisoning is a major preventable environmental health problem

The Osakis Review, 10/08/10

Summary: Children who are exposed to lead and have elevated blood lead levels can face many potential health issues. Even at relatively low levels, lead can slow a child's growth, damage hearing, cause behavior problems like a shortened attention span and aggressive behavior, decrease hand-eye coordination, and cause learning disabilities.

Exxon Works to Halt Hydrogen Sulfide Leak at Refinery

Bloomberg, 10/07/10

Summary: Exxon Mobil Corp. is working to halt a leak of compressed gas containing hydrogen sulfide at its Chalmette refinery in Louisiana that began Oct. 4, according to the company and state police. "Chalmette refining is in the process of containing a leak of compressed flammable gas which contains small amounts of hydrogen sulfide," Kevin Allexon, a spokesman for Exxon, said today in an e-mail. "We are actively mitigating the odors associated with this release, which are not considered harmful at the levels being monitored."

Worker dies at Chalmette refinery; DEQ, State Police responding to gas leak

NOLA Times-Picayune, 10/07/10

Summary: A contract worker at Chalmette Refining LLC's Chalmette plant died Wednesday night, authorities said. The worker's death comes as State Police and the Department of Environmental Quality are responding to a hydrogen sulfide gas leak at the St. Bernard Parish plant that has been ongoing since late Monday. The St. Bernard Parish Sheriff's Office identified the man as Gregory Starkey, 33, of Roseland. The Sheriff's Office said he was repairing a pipe leaking hydrogen sulfide gas. Starkey worked for Team Industrial Services of Harahan, the Sheriff's Office said.

Groups: NM cougar hunt quota is too high

NECN.com, 10/07/10

Summary: A revised plan by the state Game and Fish Department would allow more cougars to be hunted and could push the animal to the brink of extinction in New Mexico, some environmentalists claim. The state Game Commission is set to make a final decision on hunting limits for both cougars and bears during an Oct. 28 meeting in Ruidoso. The proposals garnered much attention during public meetings last summer.

Ethanol summit brings companies together to work on solutions to problems

The Grand Island Independent, 10/07/10

Summary: From government environmental regulations to export restrictions facing Nebraska's 2 billion-gallon-plus annual ethanol industry were among issues raised on Thursday at the first ever Nebraska Ethanol Summit in Grand Island. Representatives from Nebraska's 24 operating ethanol plants and industry officials gathered at the Bosselman Conference Center for the summit that featured speakers covering a wide range of ethanol-related topics, from health and environmental regulatory issues to training and job opportunities in this home-grown Nebraska industry that directly employs more than 4,000 people in rural areas of the state.

A Fishing Paradise Gains a Deadly Reputation

NY Times, 10/07/10

Summary: For decades, Falcon Lake was known primarily as an anglers' paradise, a tranquil reservoir straddling the border with Mexico where a clever fisherman could catch enormous largemouth bass. These days, however, the lake is developing a reputation for something else: piracy. As a prolonged conflict between drug dealers and the government has eroded civil order in Mexico, gangs of armed thugs in speedboats have begun robbing fishermen and tourists on the lake. Last week, gunmen in three boats reportedly shot and killed an American as he and his wife toured the lake on Jet Skis. The shooting has strained tense relations between the Texas authorities and the Mexican government. A week after David M. Hartley, 30, was reported shot in the head, the Mexican authorities have yet to find a body or any trace of his watercraft.

Notes from the Stunning Final Climate Leaders Meeting

Reuters, 10/07/10

Summary: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced last month that it would suspend its Climate Leaders program, which helped companies take greenhouse gas inventories, set emissions reduction goals, and share best practices. The Climate Leaders' annual conference previously scheduled for this week ended up being the final meeting. I attended the event and left with the following observations.

NanoScale Applies Military Know-How To Chinese Drywall Crisis

Nano Werk, 10/07/10

Summary: NanoScale Corporation (NanoScale®), a leader in advanced chemistry products, services, and technologies, today announced an expansion of its focused program to apply its chemical technology platform for use in combating the corrosive chemicals and noxious odors associated with Chinese drywall (sic. CDW, Corrosive Drywall, Contaminated Drywall). NanoScale has adapted its proprietary and patented technology for convenient use by real estate owners, occupants, and industry professionals to irreversibly capture and destroy indoor air pollutants – reactive sulfur compounds and other corrosive and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) – off-gassing from the contaminated drywall.

Wave of toxic sludge reaches the Danube River

MSNBC, 10/07/10

Summary: Toxic red sludge that burst out of a metals plant reservoir — killing at least four people and causing serious burns to others — reached the mighty River Danube Thursday. The European Union and environmental officials had feared an environmental catastrophe affecting half a dozen nations if the red sludge, a waste product of making aluminum, contaminated the 1,775-mile Danube, the second longest in Europe.

Houston Ship Channel reopens after accident

AP, 10/07/10

Summary: The Houston Ship Channel was reopened Wednesday, restoring access to one of the nation's busiest ports three days after it was shut down by a barge accident, the Coast Guard said. Vessels began moving through after an electric tower that had teetered over the waterway since the weekend accident was lowered safely to the ground. The channel is the main point of access to the country's largest petroleum refineries. It pumps about $320 million a day into Texas' economy, a figure that includes all jobs associated with the waterway, according to the Coast Guard and the nonprofit trade group Greater Houston Port Bureau.

Tribal Councils in U.S. and Canada Uniting Against Oil Sands Pipeline

Reuters, 10/07/10

Summary: Indigenous communities in Canada and the United States are singing the same tune in opposition to TransCanada's Keystone XL pipeline. Last week, representatives from Canada's First Nations traveled to Washington, D.C., to explain how mining of tar sands for heavy crude oil is causing severe health problems and environmental upheaval across their communities. They've also joined forces with Native American groups in the U.S., calling on tribal councils along the Keystone XL's route to come out against the proposed pipeline. Their concerns are being echoed on Capitol Hill by a pipeline safety organization that recently recommended to a congressional subcommittee specific safety measures to include in any potential pipeline legislation.

First Buyers of Nissan Leaf Get a Trunkful of Perks

NY Times, 10/07/10

Summary: Tax credits, rebate checks, personalized home visits, government giveaways — even customer service calls from top corporate executives. The first all-electric car from a major auto company, the Nissan Leaf, arrives at dealerships in December, but thousands of Americans are already learning that going electric can come with perks like no other car purchase. "It just keeps getting better and better," said Justin McNaughton, among the 20,000 people who have reserved a Leaf. "My wife thinks it's funny because at the end of the day, we're just buying a car." Since Mr. McNaughton, a lawyer in Nashville, paid his $99 deposit, he has been bombarded with government incentives — promises of a $7,500 federal tax credit, a $2,500 cash rebate from the state of Tennessee, and a $3,000 home-charging unit courtesy of the Energy Department.

New flooring could aid shore poultry industry

Daily Record, 10/06/10

Summary: University of Maryland, Eastern Shore officials are crowing about a recent experiment that drastically reduced the ammonia level in chicken houses. But the $1.7 million experiment is about more than reducing the stench of toxic fumes. It's about saving the Delmarva poultry industry. "If we on Delmarva don't solve this problem, we won't have an industry," Jeannine Harter-Dennis, a UMES poultry scientist, said of chicken litter. "We won't be able to meet federal government standards, and the poultry industry will go elsewhere," Harter-Dennis said, referring to states like Arkansas, the No. 1 poultry producer in the country, where labor costs are cheaper.

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Daily Environment Report™

194 DEN A-8

Air Pollution

EPA Proposes Stringent Pollution Controls For Coal-Fired Power Plant in New Mexico

PHOENIX—The Environmental Protection Agency proposed Oct. 6 to require the most stringent pollution-control technology available for the coal-fired Four Corners Power Plant in northwest New Mexico, in a bid to reduce nitrogen oxide emissions by 36,000 tons annually from the nation's largest source of the pollutant.

The agency said it seeks installation of best available retrofit technology under the Clean Air Act regional haze rule, which orders older coal-fired power plants to reduce atmospheric haze and improve visibility. The Four Corners plant, near Farmington, N.M., is 45 years old.

The proposal goes to a 60-day public comment period. Two hearings are to take place in the Four Corners area, EPA said in a statement announcing the proposed rulemaking.

Damon Gross, a spokesman for Arizona Public Service Co., operator of the plant, told BNA Oct. 7, “This is an important issue. At this time, we are evaluating the EPA's proposal. Once we have had an opportunity to thoroughly review the proposed rules, we will consider the various scenarios as they pertain to the plant.”

Action to Improve Health, Visibility

EPA said in a statement it is proposing the action as part of an effort to improve public health and visibility, particularly in areas designated as national parks and wilderness areas in the Southwest. Sixteen such sites are located in the vicinity of the plant (161 DEN A-6, 8/24/09).

Under the proposal, emissions from the plant would be lowered from 45,000 tons per year to 6,000 tons annually. The agency said its proposal is achievable by installing and operating selective catalytic reduction (SCR) on all five units at the plant.

SCR is described by the agency as cost-effective technology that will result in the greatest visibility improvement of all devices the agency considered. Once the proposal is finalized, Four Corners will have five years to add the controls.

The agency describes the potential impact of the emissions reduction as equivalent to removing half the gasoline-powered cars and trucks from Arizona's roads.

Jared Blumenfeld, EPA's Region 9 administrator, said in a prepared statement, “Adding new pollution controls at this 45-year-old plant will reduce these emissions by 80 percent. We will all be able to see the results and breathe cleaner, healthier air.”

Reaction From Sierra Club

A spokesman for the Sierra Club Arizona Grand Canyon chapter told BNA the EPA action is “a good move.”

Rob Smith, Sierra Club's senior field organizing manager, told BNA, “The Four Corners coal plant is one of the largest sources of air pollution in the country, and it's past time to clean it up to modern standards.”

Four Corners pollution, he said, creates health risks for people nearby in the Farmington area, and it creates dirty haze and acid rain in national parks through the region.

The Four Corners plant is on Navajo tribal land. Arizona Public Service Co. is the operating agent for

Four Corners, which is jointly owned by APS, Southern California Edison Co., Salt River Project, Public Service Co. of New Mexico, El Paso Electric Co., and Tucson Electric Power Co.

In addition to reducing visibility, nitrogen oxides react with other chemicals to form ozone and small particles, both harmful to public health.

By William H. Carlile

Additional information on the proposed rulemaking regarding the Four Corners Power Plant is available at http://www.epa.gov/region9/air/navajo/index.html#proposed.

Contact us at http://www.bna.com/contact/index.html or call 1-800-372-1033

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Speakers at meeting slam state environmental agency's effectiveness

By Rick Spruill

Friday, October 8, 2010

Residents criticized the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, saying it holds too much power and ignores public concerns in the interest of business.

None of the 20 residents who spoke Thursday praised the agency during a meeting to get public opinion about the agency's effectiveness.

About 200 people, including more than 50 Del Mar College students who attended in conjunction with their courses, participated in the meeting, about the agency's upcoming review by the state's Sunset Commission, which is required by state law and seeks to identify and reduce waste, duplication of efforts and inefficiency.

Tom Thomas, a teacher, said that he is distrustful of the commissioners of the agency.

"When three people can ignore the warnings of doctors, judges and even their own public interest council and make decisions, that is messed up," he said.

"The system is totally broken," said John Kelly, a local environmental activist. "And I'm not sure TCEQ shouldn't be totally abolished and we shouldn't start from scratch."

Representatives of three conservation groups gave brief presentations during the meeting Thursday night at Del Mar College's Center for Economic Development.

Their comments centered on the proposed Las Brisas Energy Center, a

$3 billion petroleum coke-fired electricity plant whose permit application is under review by the state environmental agency. If approved, the plant will be

built near the Port of Corpus Christi.

Cyrus Reed, conservation director for the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club, said that the agency's role in the Las Brisas permitting process is at the center of a national debate on energy resources and the environment.

He said that coal plants, including Las Brisas, pose an ongoing threat to the state's

environment.

Reed said the Sierra Club would like to see the agency increase fines and fees and follow the federal Clean Air Act.

Ryan Rittenhouse with Public Citizen said that the decision to allow coal plants should not rest with the agency's three commissioners.

"The commissioners are completely ignoring their mission, which is to guard the state's environment, not its economy," he said.

Coal-fired plants add toxins such as mercury into the environment. He added that the Gulf Coast and 13 Texas lakes and reservoirs and three rivers are under mercury contamination advisories for two species of fish.

Daniel Lucio, a Corpus Christi resident, said the Las Brisas permit process has not involved the public. He said that the commissioners, who decide which permits are approved, hold too much power.

Donna Phillips, area director for the agency's Coastal Bend and East Texas Region, told the crowd that the agency's primary goal is a clean environment and the agency creates and enforces regulations to that end.

The state agency, second only to the U.S Environmental Protection Agency in size and jurisdiction, is one of 29 under commission scrutiny this year, including the state's Public Utility Commission, Railroad Commission and Department of Transportation.

The Sunset Commission is composed of five appointees from each state legislative body and two private citizens. Legislative members serve four-year terms and private citizens serve two-year terms on the commission.

All are appointed by the lieutenant governor and the speaker of the House.

The Sunset Advisory Commission will hear testimony from the agency, commission staff members and the public at hearings Dec. 15 and 16 in Austin.

The commission will submit its recommendations to the Legislature when it convenes next year.

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TOP STORY

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 08, 2010

Cap-and-trade plans meet up with greenhouse gas skeptics

By Rob Gurwitt, Special to Stateline

Photo by Getty Images

A few weeks from now, on November 2, New Mexico's Environmental Improvement Board is scheduled to vote on proposed regulations setting in motion a cap-and-trade program for greenhouse gases. It is likely to approve them. That same day, voters will elect a new governor. She will object to the whole idea.

The state board — its members appointed by outgoing Democratic Governor Bill Richardson — has been considering regulations to lay the groundwork for New Mexico's participation in the cap-and-trade program envisioned by the Western Climate Initiative, an effort involving seven states and three Canadian provinces to reduce carbon emissions.

It has been a hotly contested proposal, and both gubernatorial candidates, Democrat Diane Denish and Republican Susana Martinez, oppose the new regulations. Martinez, who holds a slight lead in the polls, said in August that she doubted that human activity is fueling climate change; Denish believes cap-and-trade would put New Mexico at an economic disadvantage with its neighbors.

Even so, the environmental board appears likely to give the go-ahead, launching the process for creating a market in emissions allowances — and leaving it to the next governor to decide whether or not to dismantle it. "Things that are said on the campaign trail aren't always the same thing that happens when someone's in office," says Jim Norton, director of the Environmental Protection Division of the state's Environment Department, and a prime mover behind the proposed regulations. "So it remains to be seen what the actual policies of the new governor will be."

Cap-and-trade is essentially a way for the government (state government, up to now) to cut carbon emissions by mandating a limit on the amount of pollution that can be spewed into the atmosphere (the cap). Industries can negotiate among themselves, with investors and with the government to find ways to exchange their pollution allowances to bring combined emissions into compliance (the trade). The system essentially makes it possible for the private sector to purchase the right to pollute while maintaining the strict government-imposed emissions cap.

Around the country, the three regional greenhouse gas accords—WCI, the western states compact that New Mexico is part of; the Northeast's Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, or RGGI; and the Midwestern Greenhouse Gas Reduction Accord (MGGRA)—have found themselves unlikely holders of the political spotlight this year, thanks to the failure of a cap-and-trade plan to pass Congress. Governorships and state legislatures currently in the hands of political leaders who support the regional agreements will belong to newcomers, some with dramatically different ideas, and opponents of the whole scheme see the upcoming election as a watershed.

"I think the gubernatorial elections will change the political landscape in a lot of these states, with new governors coming from a free-market perspective," says Clint Woods, of the right-leaning American Legislative Exchange Council. "New governors tend to have a longer-term perspective, and they'll see that the upcoming deadlines for reducing greenhouse gases will cause economic hardship and stall the recovery. So I think they'll take a real hard look at their states' involvement."

Making money

Yet when you get down to the details of the three regional accords — each of which is different, and in a different stage of implementation — it's clear that while the compacts are entering a politically unsettled period, they may well prove more robust than their critics would like. The Western and Midwestern agreements are broad enough that, even without cap-and-trade, their member states can still make progress on reducing greenhouse gases. And in

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the east, RGGI is working with the decided advantage that it is already bringing revenues into state coffers.

That is because RGGI was the first of the three accords to actually implement a cap-and-trade regime, although unlike the other two, it encompasses only emissions related to electricity production. Among RGGI's 10 member states — the six New England states, plus New York, New Jersey, Maryland and Delaware — there is a possibility that the elections could produce one or more Republican governors overtly hostile to the accord.

In Maine, Republican candidate Paul LePage called global warming science "a scam," and signed the "no climate tax pledge" put forth by Americans for Prosperity, a conservative public policy group that has been pressing to dismantle the regional trading program; the most recent polls show LePage in a dead heat with Democrat Libby Mitchell. In Massachusetts, Republican Charlie Baker, who is one of two candidates challenging Democratic incumbent Deval Patrick, has said that he is uncertain about the state's continued participation in RGGI and needs to study it. In New York, Republican Carl Paladino, who is trailing Democrat Andrew Cuomo in recent polls, has called global warming "a farce."

Yet in the RGGI states — unlike in New Mexico — the language mandating each state's participation is statutory, passed by the various legislatures. "Withdrawing from the program is not just stroke-of-a-pen material by a governor," notes Seth Kaplan, of the Conservation Law Foundation.

And convincing a legislature to reverse itself may not be easy, since the RGGI states have seen tangible benefits from the program. Overall, there have been nine auctions held by RGGI since 2009, in which electric utilities and some investment firms have bought emissions allowances. And those auctions have raised some $729 million for a range of emissions-reduction and energy-efficiency programs — benefiting both homeowners and industrial users — as well as financing an occasional raid to balance a state's general budget.

In New Jersey, where Republicans in the Legislature have introduced bills in each house to withdraw from RGGI, Republican Governor Chris Christie used RGGI proceeds to subsidize the development of the state's offshore wind program; under pressure from the right, he has remained silent about his stance on RGGI itself, but he is a strong proponent of offshore wind power.

"It's hard to imagine the process by which a governor would say that his state will no longer require allowances for [an electricity] generator," says Phil Giudice, commissioner of Massachusetts' Department of Energy Resources. "Those companies have already purchased allowances and now the allowances are going to be valued at zero? They won't be happy. And all those things funded by RGGI — are they now going to be funded out of the general state budget?"

Meanwhile, in the West, WCI has developed limited momentum of its own, although it has had its share of bumps along the way. Of its seven U.S. member states, only two — California and New Mexico — have made tangible progress toward creating a cap-and-trade regime. The governors of Arizona, Utah and Montana have refused to pursue it; the governors of Oregon and Washington State proposed enabling legislation, but were rebuffed by their legislatures.

This leaves the future of WCI's cap-and-trade program unsettled. An initiative backed by out-of-state oil and gas companies to suspend California's landmark global warming legislation, AB32, would have the effect of ending the state's participation in cap-and-trade if it passes. Meg Whitman, the Republican candidate for governor, has proposed a one-year moratorium on the law's implementation if she wins.

California rules

Because of its size, California is the linchpin of WCI's cap-and-trade program. "I don't think California can do it by itself," says Janice Adair, of Washington State's Department of Ecology, "but I wonder if anyone can do it without California." New Mexico's proposed regulations explicitly say that the state won't move forward without other U.S. partners. The three Canadian provinces that also are part of the agreement — Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec — already have passed enabling legislation and might create a market without any U.S. participants, but they're remaining non-committal.

Yet cap-and-trade was always envisioned as simply one part of WCI's emissions-reduction efforts, and at a September meeting in Montreal its members decided on a "portfolio" approach — in essence, to focus on additional ways of reducing greenhouse-gas production. "No matter how the elections go, we want to be able to present an agenda that is broad in scope and therefore appealing whether or not a new governor wants to work on cap-and-trade," says Patrick Cummins, who staffs WCI for the Western Governors Association. "While WCI is still committed to cap-and-trade, if a state or province is not interested in it, that's not a barrier to participating in WCI, as long as they are committed to taking action on climate change."

Indeed, even states with no stomach for WCI's cap-and-trade plan — including Arizona, where Governor Jan Brewer's executive order ending participation in cap-and-trade also reaffirmed the state's commitment to remaining part of WCI — intend to continue with the accord's broader discussions, especially as they relate to clean-energy development.

Still, there is no question that cap-and-trade remains the heart of the regional efforts to reduce carbon emissions. That's why the battles over the drive to get it up and running in WCI and MGGRA are likely to remain contentious — although calculations will undoubtedly change should California and the Canadian provinces establish a working market. Meanwhile, all three

compacts are working together on developing other protocols, such as low-carbon fuel standards. And RGGI isn't showing any signs of backing off: Its impact on carbon prices so far has been minimal, so its members are deep in the weeds of figuring out how to improve both its operations and its impact.

In the end, says Massachusetts' Phil Giudice, "We're not necessarily going to have leadership from the federal government. So it is going to be about the states leading on these issues."

—Contact Rob Gurwitt at editor@stateline.org

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The Progress Report

Smog may add to diabetes risk

Top 10 Dirtiest US Cities

Minimize your risk of developing diabetes by driving less or moving to a low-smog county -- or by geonomizing your economy. We trim, blend, and append two 2010 articles from (1) *USA Today,* Sept 29, on diabetes by Mary Brophy Marcus; and (2) Care2, Sep 29, on dirty cities posted by Melissa Breyer.

by Mary Brophy Marcus and by Melissa Breyer

Smog may add to diabetes risk

Researchers from Children's Hospital Boston found a strong correlation between adult diabetes and particulate air pollution. The research is published in the journal *Diabetes Care.*

The correlation persists even after adjustment for other risk factors, including obesity and ethnicity, says study author John Brownstein, assistant professor at Children's Hospital Boston.

The investigators obtained county-by-county data on pollution levels from the Environmental Protection Agency during 2004 and 2005, as well as Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and US Census information on the prevalence of adult diabetes, Brownstein says.

Especially striking, he says, was the finding that counties that were within EPA limits still showed significant prevalence of diabetes.

Endocrinologist Joel Zonszein of Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx NY said, "Here in the Bronx, we have areas that are highly polluted by the Cross Bronx Expressway. We have clinical studies showing diabetes and asthma are very high in these communities."

Top 10 Dirtiest US Cities

More stringent regulations and clean air initiatives have helped with the air quality problem the United States faces, but over 175 million people in the US -- roughly 58% -- still suffer from pollution levels that are often dangerous, according to the

American Lung Association.

The most common kinds of air pollution fall into two categories: ozone (smog) and particle pollution (soot). Breathing either does not do a body good. Air pollution is a serious health threat that affects all exposed to it. It can lead to large variety of lung ailments and can have a severe impact on cardiovascular health -- it speeds up aging and it can be deadly. Some of the biggest sources of air pollution are dirty power plants, old diesel vehicles and heavy equipment, and ocean-going vessels.

Ozone (O3) is a highly reactive gas molecule composed of three oxygen atoms. Although in the upper atmosphere ozone is essential (it protects us from much of the sun's ultraviolet radiation, thank you ozone) -- ozone air pollution at our level is harmful and causes serious health problems by attacking lung tissue and causing inflammation and other damage.

Ozone is in the atmosphere from raw gases that come out of tailpipes, smokestacks and many other sources. These essential raw ingredients for ozone are nitrogen oxides (NOx) and hydrocarbons, also called volatile organic compounds (VOCs). They are produced primarily when fossil fuels like gasoline, oil or coal are burned or when some chemicals, like solvents, evaporate.

Since ozone is a secondary pollutant (not formed directly by the burning of fossil fuels, but from nitrogen oxides produced by such combustion, and that then react in the presence of sunlight) it is the biggest problem in areas that are sunny and hot. In addition, LA is a low basin surrounded by mountains, with an enormous amount of automobile traffic.

From the America Lung Association State of the Air Report 2010, here are the ten cities with the highest levels of ozone, number 1 being the worst -- with any other rankings they scored for particle pollution.
1o. Charlotte-Gastonia-Salisbury, NC-SC
9. San Luis Obispo-Paso Robles, CA
8. San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, CA Ranked 17th for short-term particle pollution.
7. Houston-Baytown-Huntsville, TX Ranked 16th for year round particle pollution.
6. Hanford-Corcoran, CA Ranked 8th for year round particle pollution and 10th for short-term particle pollution.
5. Sacramento-Arden-Arcade-Yuba City, CA-NV Ranked 6th for short-term particle pollution.
4. Fresno-Madera, CA Ranked 6th for year round particle pollution and 2nd for short-term particle pollution.
3. Visalia-Porterville, CA Ranked 3rd for year round particle pollution and 8th for short-term particle pollution.
2. Bakersfield, CA Ranked 2nd for year round particle pollution and 1st for short-term particle pollution.
1. Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside, CA Ranked 4th for year round particle pollution and 3rd for short-term particle pollution.

Here are just a few steps you can take to improve air quality:
• Drive less
• Don't burn wood or trash

• Use less electricity
• Make sure your school system requires clean buses.

JJS: While those steps are worth taking, they won't eradicate killer smog. Big problems need big solutions. There are clean fuels, engines, transit systems, and efficient motors. Why don't we use them? Because prices tell us not to. We distort prices by taxing goods and subsidizing bads. We need to reverse that policy 180 degrees.

Don't subsidize sprawl and oil and car dependency but charge people for using public roads and the common atmosphere. Make sure all the costs that cars impose -- not just road repair but collision response and traffic cops and courts and pollution from smog and oily runoff -- are paid by the car driver via a surcharge on fuels at the pump.

And charge private landowners for exclusive use of land. The strongest tax shift we could employ would be to shift the property tax. Shift it off buildings, onto land. Then owners would not speculate with vacant lots but instead in-fill cities. That would shorten trip distances and let people walk or ride bikes or buses.

People respond to prices. Make prices tell people the costs they impose on their health and the health of others. Nobody has a right to pollute, just for their convenience or profit. You do have a right to a healthy environment. Demand it.

With your right to a healthful Earth, you also have a right to a share of Earth. When those rights shape public revenue policy, then you have geonomics in action. It's an action good for your lungs and the whole environment.

Editor Jeffery J. Smith runs the Forum on Geonomics.

Also see:

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Texas acts on flaming faucets in Montague County

by JIM DOUGLAS

Bio | **Email**

WFAA

Posted on October 6, 2010 at 10:38 PM

Updated yesterday at 10:47 PM

Recommend

MONTAGUE COUNTY — Stephen Brock's kitchen faucet burped so much flammable gas back in July, he feared his Montague County home might blow up.

When he held a lighter under the faucet, a plume of flame shot out.

"It totally enveloped the whole sink," he said. "I jumped back and turned the water off, then I called the Railroad Commission right away."

That's the agency that oversees oil and gas drilling in Texas.

"The Railroad Commission guy told me it's coming through my well, coming up through my water well," Brock told us in July.

Brock recently sued the Jack Grace production company of Wichita Falls, which once operated an oil well nearby. According to the suit, tests on Brock's well water revealed extremely high chloride levels as well as arsenic, chromium, barium, mercury and methane.

The Railroad Commission also cited the company for the well. According to the citation:

> "...this facility threatens to pollute or is polluting surface or subsurface water..."

The company told News 8 it could not comment on pending litigation.

The case bolsters claims by others who believe gas drilling has contaminated their water wells.

"I don't think; I know," said Larry Bisidas, who digs water wells in Wise County for a living. "I've been doing this 40 years."

Bisidas now has a gas well outside his front door near Decatur.

"I had good water for 31 years, and when they set this thing in there, it messed up my well, two wells for me, my neighbor's well," he said.

Several miles north near the town of Alvord, tests reportedly showed benzene in one water well near gas wells.

Bisidas is still waiting on his test results, and joking about having bottled water brought in to his home.

"That's pretty bad for a well man, ain't it?"

He laughs, but he's also worried that if his well water is ruined, so is the value of his property.

E-mail **jdouglas@wfaa.com**

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October 15

October 7, 2010

Hard Truths on the Spill

In May, President Obama asked a blue-ribbon commission to determine the causes of the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, find out "what worked and didn't" in the government's response and identify ways to make drilling safer. He asked for frank talk, and he's getting it.

On Wednesday, the commission released four preliminary staff reports. One said, sensibly, that we need to know more about spill response in Arctic waters before drilling can proceed off Alaska; the other said that coordination among federal, state and local governments must be improved.

The other two reports were far more critical. The one on the dispersants used to break up the oil suggested that the administration — though poorly prepared — had been lucky. There was only one type of dispersant available in sufficient quantities at the time, but it did a reasonably good job of preventing major slicks and appears to be less toxic to fish than feared. (Its long-term effects won't be determined for months or years.)

The sharpest criticisms were of the administration's public response. By underestimating the oil flow, and then overestimating the oil removed, it said the administration "created the impression that it was either not fully competent to handle the spill or not fully candid with the American people about the scope of the problem."

To its credit, the administration recently agreed to assemble a group of top scientists to determine how much oil remains and what to do about it. But the White House's thin skin was on display Thursday, as officials insisted that nothing was ever concealed and that it threw everything it had at the problem. We suspect this will not be the last dust-up.

The commission needs to call it as it sees it. And the White House needs to understand that the

best chance of ensuring that this disaster is never repeated is to acknowledge and then confront what went wrong.

Everything New Orleans

Flashing warning lights on Deepwater Horizon were 'a lot to take in,' safety systems worker testifies

Published: Thursday, October 07, 2010, 6:00 AM

David Hammer, The Times-Picayune

In the final moments before the Deepwater Horizon exploded April 20 killing 11 men, the worker who monitored the oil rig's safety systems said she failed to immediately sound alarms when indicator lights warned her of the highest danger.

View full size

Patrick Semansky, The Associated Press

Some have speculated that BP made time-and money-saving decisions that compromised safety because of the cost overruns, but BPâ□□s Michael Beirne said such overruns are not uncommon. Beirne, right, was photographed at Wednesday's hearing with his attorney Michael Monico.

In testimony before a federal investigative panel in Metairie late Tuesday, Andrea Fleytas said she felt the rig jolt that evening and saw more than 10 magenta lights flash on her screen notifying her that the highest level of combustible gas had entered the rig's shaker house and drill shack, critical areas where the rig's drilling team was at work.

Everyone who was thought to be working in that area of the rig was killed. If the general alarm had sounded, it may have given them time to evacuate to safer areas. All 115 workers who survived were located in other parts of the rig.

Fleytas said she was trained to sound a general alarm any time more than one indicator light flashed, but didn't do so immediately in this case because she had never been trained to deal with such an overwhelming number of warnings.

"It was a lot to take in," Fleytas said, testifying by telephone from California. "There was a lot going on."

She said she eventually "went over and hit the alarms" after the first or two large explosions.

Members of the Marine Board investigative panel and lawyers for various parties of interest never asked Fleytas how much time passed between when the first high-gas indicators lit up and the explosion. But BP's chronology of events, based on rig data and employee interviews, estimated it was anywhere from 1 to 2 minutes.

View full size

Patrick Semansky, The Associated Press

A memorial ribbon for the 11 lost souls from the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion is seen on the lapel of BP contractor Nick Wilson, who was aboard the rig when it exploded.

Fleytas herself testified that after the jolt and before the first explosion there was time for several things to

happen: Startled by the disturbance, colleague Yancy Keplinger left a rig-steering simulator and directed a closed-circuit television camera to the starboard side of the rig to find drilling mud gushing out of a diverter tube; Fleytas received a telephone call from crew members on the drill floor who said they were fighting a kick of gas and oil in the well; she took another call from the engine control room asking what was happening and she told them they were having a well control problem; and she continued to hit buttons on her console acknowledging the multiple gas alarms popping up in various sectors of the rig.

A few seconds after she got off the telephone with the engine room, there was a blackout on the rig. A few seconds after that, the first explosion rang out, Fleytas testified. It was then that she sounded the general alarm.

Rig owner Transocean had decided to make the sounding of their rigs' general alarms a manual function, to prevent them from triggering automatically whenever a fire or gas signal registered in more than one zone. The company has said it wanted to give employees on the bridge control over the general alarm so the fleet wouldn't experience so many false alarms.

Also critical to protecting the doomed members of the Deepwater Horizon's drill team was a system that could have cut off ignition sources once gas entered the rig. Fleytas said there was an emergency shutdown system someone could have activated to shut off ventilation to certain areas, such as the drill shack and engine room, to keep methane gas from igniting or overspeeding the engines.

But Fleytas said she knew of no protocols for activating the emergency shutdown and no one activated it. Gas likely ignited in the drilling area, killing everyone there, and also caused the two active engines to rev so high that all power on the rig was lost, preventing fire pumps from working and keeping the rig from moving away from the spewing well.

Fleytas is a dynamic positioning operator who is responsible for monitoring rig systems from the bridge and using computerized controls to keep the rig in place. At the time of the incident, Keplinger, the senior dynamic positioning operator, was helping corporate officials who were visiting the rig use a video-game-style simulator.

Keplinger said in his own testimony that it was after the explosion when he first "noticed a lot of gas in there and called" the shaker house to try to get whoever may have been there out, but nobody answered the phone.

Fleytas said that Capt. Curt Kuchta, the rig's master, was near her when the magenta lights indicated the highest possible danger of combustible gas, but she said she didn't know if he saw them. But she also said she didn't need to consult with anyone or wait for any orders to activate the general alarm when the multiple lights went off.

In other news from the Marine Board hearings in Metairie, a BP employee that monitored drilling finances at the Macondo well testified Wednesday that the project was $54 million overbudget when the blowout

happened. That's well beyond the $43 million previously estimated by investigators and a mark-up of almost 60 percent over the originally budgeted cost.

Some have speculated that BP made time-and money-saving decisions that compromised safety because of the cost overruns, but BP's Michael Beirne said such overruns are not uncommon. He said he'd handled costs for one other BP well in the Gulf of Mexico and it was a full $100 million in the red.

Beirne said Anadarko Petroleum and MOEX Offshore agreed to invest a total of 35 percent of the project's cost after drilling had already begun, but signed off on all of the additional costs and had the ability to track all rig activity. Still, the agreement between the two investors and BP says that Anadarko and MOEX bear no liability for losses if it is determined that they were due to negligence by operator BP.

David Hammer can be reached at ***dhammer@timespicayune.com*** *or 504.826.3322.*

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Everything New Orleans

Oyster harvester trying to find his footing 5 months after Gulf oil spill

Published: Wednesday, October 06, 2010, 5:03 PM Updated: Wednesday, October 06, 2010, 6:44 PM

Chris Kirkham, The Times-Picayune

For more than 70 days this summer, Bernard Picone's life was reduced to a 12-foot-by-16-foot existence aboard his sturdy steel oyster boat, the Capt. Ethan.

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Photos by Ted Jackson, The Times-Picayune

Oysterman Bernard Picone works on his boat, the Capt. Ethan, at the docks in Pointe a la Hache, hoping there will be oysters in the beds when the season opens Nov. 15.

After the **BP oil spill** in the Gulf of Mexico, his contract job cleaning oil and hauling boom in Barataria Bay put him across the Mississippi River and miles away from his home in **Phoenix**, a tiny enclave on Plaquemines Parish's east bank. So he and three deckhands simply stayed on the boat full-time, sometimes anchoring in the passes off Grand Isle, occasionally retreating to Empire or Lafitte during rough weather.

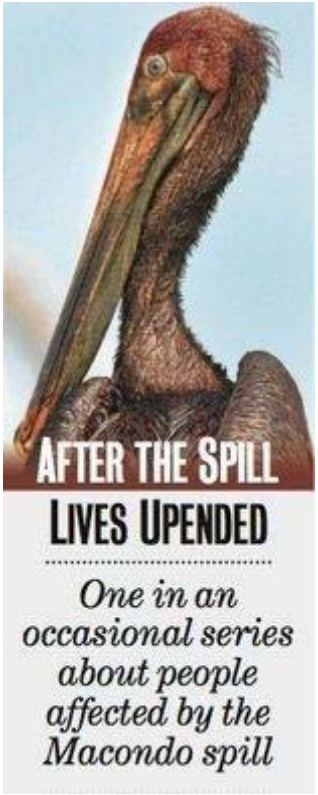
"We're fishermen. We stay on the boat a lot," Picone said on a recent afternoon at the Pointe-a-la-Hache boat harbor near his home. "But we don't ever spend that kind of time out on the boat."

Cleanup work is over for Picone. His boat and 11 others in the work crew were laid off earlier this month.

Now, it's back to virtual unemployment and a future that's far from certain.

A lifetime of dredging oysters

Picone, 42, has dredged oysters for nearly 20 years. He has never had a boss, save for two years when he worked as an electrician in his 20s. But the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion April 20 changed that in an instant.



As fishing grounds were closed because of threat of oil contamination, fishers headed to safety courses in an effort to qualify for oil cleanup work. Some of the highlights: Don't drink the oil; don't put the oil on your body; don't stick your hand between your boat and another boat.

Picone still chuckles when he thinks about it.

"I mean if everybody's in a class and they're holding all their fingers, we know not to put our hands between boats," he said.

In June Picone got hired to do oil cleanup with the DRC Group, a BP contractor, joining thousands of others across the Gulf Coast who made the transition from independent fisher to contracted cleanup employee. The pay was $1,500 per day.

Picone was laid off Sept. 2, but his boat still bears the red inscription "MC 252," signifying the Deepwater Horizon well location, Mississippi Canyon Block 252. Every boat involved with the spill response needed the

insignia.

He'd like to erase the reminder of this summer, but there are grave concerns about the health of the oyster beds he fishes. So he's keeping his options open.

"I just didn't take it off yet, in case they call us back," Picone said. "But when it's time for it to get painted, it's gone."

Picone's newfound free time is hardly a vacation.

Two weeks ago he spent two full days getting a fourth certification to be square with Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards, to try getting back on with one of BP's cleanup contractors. At the same time he has been back and forth to various mechanics and welders, piecing together his second boat, the Capt. Scott. The goal is to get it back in shape before public oyster grounds reopen.

When that will be is a huge unknown.

The ripple effect

Typically the public grounds in Louisiana would open for a few weeks around this time of year, in late September, and then reopen in November. The September opening didn't happen this year, meaning most oyster bedding grounds in southeast Louisiana won't open until Nov. 15. Private leaseholders rely on the public seed grounds to cultivate their private oyster beds to grow new crops for future seasons.

View full size

'If you take out the fishing industry, you'd be surprised what else you take out with it,' fisherman Bernard Picone says of the ripple effect after the BP oil spill.

Although numerous private lease zones have been reopened, oyster leaseholders across the state have reported large areas of dead oysters on the reefs. Most point to the effects of the freshwater diversions along the Mississippi River that the state opened in May in an effort to keep oil out of the estuaries.

Oysters require a delicate balance of salinity and freshwater for survival, and adjustments in either direction can cause them to perish. Leaseholders east and west of the river have been scooping up large amounts of "boxes" -- empty, open oyster shells -- where the animals have presumably died.

The lack of production, combined with so many fishers employed by BP, has had a ripple effect from seafood processors to restaurants, even to the welders, machinists and netmakers who supply the fishing industry.

"If you take out the fishing industry, you'd be surprised what else you take out with it," Picone said.

For all these reasons, the constant talk of seafood promotion and marketing has perplexed Picone.

He thinks the state should focus most of its efforts on rehabilitating the environment: bringing new shells and seed oysters to repopulate reefs.

Picone was born in Gretna, but he has spent the bulk of his life in the marsh. As a child he moved to Grand Bayou, a village on the west bank of Plaquemines Parish, where the homes, still, are accessible only by boat. He remained there until Hurricane Katrina, which pushed him to Phoenix on the opposite side of the river.

"I've been doing this a long time, and you've got good years and bad years with any seafood. It's just like farming," he said. "But they want to talk about 'promote, promote.' Well, what if we ain't got nothing to promote?"

Turning to crabs

The bad years for Picone were just beginning to fade when oil from BP's deep-sea well came gushing out this spring. Katrina did a number on the marinas and boats of Plaquemines Parish; Picone's boat was in a grove of trees nearly two miles from where he chained it before the storm.

But Katrina also decimated vast swaths of oyster reefs, smothering them with mud and killing nearly 70 percent of the crop on public grounds east of the river. With fewer powerful storms in recent years -- Gustav and Ike hit farther west than Katrina -- oyster yields had been steadily increasing.

Now many of those gains have been erased.

With the future of oysters up in the air, Picone is looking to plug the gaps with crabs. For now, he's living off the pay he socked away working for DRC during the summer, investing in repairs to his boats.

Starting from scratch in the crab business isn't a simple task. For one, he'll need to refurbish a smaller boat. And buying a starter set of 400 crab traps -- priced at $35 each -- is a huge investment.

With the latest safety course under his belt, Picone has also been inquiring about getting back in the cleanup

business. But without a doubt, what he wants to do is catch seafood.

"That's why I'm out here working on my boats, because I want my boats to fish," he said. "But I have to live."

Whether Picone ends up fishing or going back to the oil cleanup will have a ripple effect up the supply chain. Kenneth Fox, who owns several of the private oyster leases that Picone fishes, admits that BP work is competition for him. But he understands the dynamics.

"This is like sure money compared to guessing if you are still going to be in the oyster business," Fox said. "I don't blame him for going. If I knew I could go out and make a thousand dollars a day, I'd be a damn fool to turn it down and go out there for a maybe."

For now, Picone is still waiting for his claim for lost fishing income to be processed by Kenneth Feinberg, the administrator of BP's $20 billion oil spill claims fund, who had initially promised that individuals would get their money within 48 hours.

Picone submitted the income tax information, the fishing trip tickets and the copy of his commercial license, but the money hasn't come. He's pretty sure his DRC income won't last until oyster season. He's hoping it won't come to that.

"Put it like this, my 48 hours will be over by November," Picone said.

*Chris Kirkham can be reached at **ckirkham@timespicayune.com** or 504.826.3321.*

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October 7, 2010

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Jerry Cope and Charles Hambleton

Posted: October 6, 2010 05:14 PM

Corexit Use Still Appears to Be Prevalent in the Gulf, Despite Official Statements

Since the blown-out well at the Mississippi Canyon 252 Macondo site has been capped and the cleanup operations in the Gulf declared a success, BP has summarily fired thousands of workers without notice who were left unemployed as a result of the disaster. Local, state and federal agencies have been working to present a picture of normalcy, declaring the seafood safe to eat, the beaches clean and the water free from oil. The actual situation along the Gulf Coast is far from normal, with many people evacuating due to sickness and financial distress. Independent scientific reports continue to conclude the safety of the seafood is questionable at best, the beaches remain thoroughly contaminated, and the majority of the oil and dispersant is still in the water column or at the bottom of the Gulf.

Upon arriving back on the Gulf Coast three weeks ago, the first thing we found were containers of Nalco Corexit, which according to BP, the Coast Guard, NOAA and the EPA has not been used since mid-July. On the ferry boat to Dauphin Island on Aug. 25, we had the pleasure of being photographed by a Coast Guard Officer whose job was to record everyone traveling on the ferry and also the license plate numbers on all the vehicles. The officer said he could not discuss the spill but did relate his enthusiasm to return home to his family on the East Coast. Shortly after arriving on Dauphin Island we found numerous containers of Corexit and were treated to yet another day of constant surveillance by two Sheriff's Deputies, a local police officer, and what appeared to be a DHS officer in the ever-present black SUV. We discovered the Corexit in two locations on the island, one of which was a privately owned marina whose owner demanded we leave immediately. The pictures below of containers with Corexit 9500 at the private-owned marina were taken next to the highway on a local's bicycle with a Sheriff's deputy pulled up with his siren blaring and lights flashing. The next day the containers were gone.

The following week we went back to Dauphin Island and spoke to the Mark Smith, BP Deputy Branch Director in charge of the operations on the island, regarding the presence of Corexit on the island.

Two nights earlier on Aug. 23, a local resident found containers clearly labeled 9527 at Bayou La Batre. According to official statements, Corexit 9527 supplies were depleted in May and has not been used since then. The BP/Coast Guard operations using the Corexit dispersants 9527 and 9500 have been the subject of intense criticism. Initially, BP, the Coast Guard, NOAA, and the EPA admitted to using the more toxic 9527, which contains 2-butoxyethanol, in concentrations exceeding 50% of the dispersant. 2-butoxyethanol is known to bioaccumulate in the marine food chain. The effects on marine life and human health can be devastating. One senior staffer to a US senator agreed that the use of more than two million gallons of Corexit in the Gulf is "the largest experiment ever conducted on a civilian population without their knowledge or consent in history."

Mike Fischer, who for years was dockmaster at the Bear Point Marina, witnessed dispersant being sprayed over lagoons surrounded by civilian populations. VOO (Vessels of Opportunity) deckhands and captains witnessed dispersant being deployed less than one mile off the Alabama and Mississippi Coasts as late as mid-September from small skiffs and planes flying at night without lights. This brings into question official statements by BP, the EPA, and the Coast Guard, who have claimed that no dispersants have been deployed since mid-July, aside from a very small amount, and that they were never used within three miles of shore or on inland waterways (unless approval was obtained).

In fact, there are numerous accounts of the Corexit dispersant being used on inland waterways, lagoons, and bayous. Margaret Long, a resident of Cotton Bayou in Alabama paid to have

independent tests done on soil and water samples taken from her property. The results showed high concentrations of markers for Corexit. The official excuse repeatedly used to explain the 2-butoxyethanol in test results that it can be found in many household products is nothing short of absurd. It is simply not plausible to postulate that enough detergent or shampoo or hand lotion has been dumped on Margaret's property or in Cotton Bayou to elevate levels to what was confirmed. Below are the published test results.

ANALYTICAL CHEMICAL TESTING
LABORATORY, INC.

Consulting Chemists, Scientists, & Engineers

August 18, 2010

Report To: [redacted] Long
Orange Beach, AL 36561

Report Of: Chemical Analysis- Water Samples
BP Oil Spill Study-Gulf Coast Areas

Job #: 10-3095

Attention: [redacted] Long email: [redacted]

Analytical Chemical Laboratory has completed the analysis of soil and water samples taken from Gulf Coast areas as listed below. The samples were analyzed for specific parameters, as directed and the following is reported:

Sampled: 08/07-09/10 by HL
Analyzed: 08/10-16/10 by LCB, MS, JBN, KMG
Reviewed: 08/18/10 by R. Naman

SAMPLE	PARAMETERS	RESULTS	IDENTIFICATION
ACT ID# 10-3095-0809-1 Long Property Shore water	2-butoxyethanol marker for @Corexit	13.3 p.p.m.	

SAMPLE	PARAMETERS	RESULTS	IDENTIFICATION
ACT ID# 10-3095-0809-1 Long Property Shore water	Propylene Glycol marker for @Corexit	<10 p.p.m.	

SAMPLE	PARAMETERS	RESULTS	IDENTIFICATION
ACT ID# 10-3095-0809-2 Margaret Harkness Shore Water	Oil and Grease	2 p.p.m.	

One of the fisherman who was enlisted early on the week immediately after the April 20 blowout

spent up to 20 days at a time out on the water at the source. He and his coworkers were later assigned to the VOO program and and spent their days closer to shore spotting oil. All of these workers experienced various health issues indicative of chemical exposure. Initially they were given no Hazmat training or protective equipment of any kind. When BP and the US Coast Guard began spraying the Corexit dispersants, the boats in the area were instructed to move out of the area, but not so far that they could not visually observe the planes spraying from the air. In August and September they witnessed skiffs and barges dumping dispersant within one mile of the beaches along the Alabama coast. In one known case of extreme incompetence, Corexit was sprayed directly on a boat full of workers. The entire crew of the vessel was hospitalized and remain on disability. Many of these individuals previously would not speak out on any aspect of the spill, but as BP has terminated the VOO and all programs providing desperately needed employment for locals, they are now voicing their anger and disgust. Note to BP and other petroleum companies, if you really want to keep the workers silenced, be sure to continue to pay them for several months after the initial dirty work is done.

For months now there has been ongoing speculation as to why the federal government through the EPA and the US Coast Guard allowed the toxic dispersant to be sprayed across the Gulf when every NATO ally has banned its use as well as virtually every other coastal country in the world. The Corexit dispersants are highly toxic, especially when combined with oil and bioaccumulate in the food chain, making marine life tenuous and adversely affecting the long-term health of residents along the coast. What they do accomplish is sending the oil down the water column so that from the air it is virtually invisible. As with most other aspects of "cleanup" operations related to the blowout, appearances were far more important than reality, and the images shown on national media to the public of overriding concern. Clearly one factor in these decisions was allowing BP to not lose their investment in the drilling site and to collect some portion of the oil exploding from the wellhead.

More insight into the motivation for possibly not sealing the well early and creating an acceptable face for media consumption was provided by John Bean, who was a supervisor for one of BP's main subcontractors P2S. Mr. Bean's responsibilities included supervising more than 450 cleanup workers for a large portion of the resort beaches in Alabama and cleanup operations at "Green Acres," the command center in Gulf Shores; which, not coincidentally, was leased by BP from the private owner, Gulf Shores Mayor Robert Craft's family estate. While taking a break at the Green Acres command center, Bean overheard a conversation between two men both with satellite phones.

One of the men told the other that "the numbers are in," and that BP had collected enough oil from the spill to cover 100% of the costs resulting from the spill.

Taylor Hood was also employed in the VOO program. Hood and his fellow crew members were accompanied by an older gentlemen from Arkansas who was in charge of air monitoring for their vessel. After repeatedly coming up with negative readings when they were surrounded by oil, Taylor and his shipmates, just for "shits and grins," had the official place his device directly down close to the water over a large patch of oil. Not surprisingly, the device showed zero on whatever it was calibrated to measure. Situation normal. Far from being an isolated incident, these firsthand accounts of intentional deception and cover-ups are endless.

Reports of continued fish kills numbering in the hundreds of thousands continue to come in along the Gulf Coast, especially in southern Louisiana. A large number of fisherman refuse to sell their catches and feel it unconscionable to represent seafood coming out of the Gulf as safe for human consumption. Oyster beds are dead and dying with the offspring unable to survive due to changes in membrane viscosity caused by the dispersant. Several owners of private oyster farms see the end of their family businesses, which had been a mainstay for the coastal economy for generations. Among the coastal communities sickness from chemical exposure, suicides, depression, bankruptcy, and involuntary relocation/evacuations are now commonplace occurrences. The vast majority holds not only BP responsible, but the federal government as well. The government allowed BP to dictate the response to the spill and was instrumental in assisting BP in not only covering the Gulf with toxic dispersants but subsequently covering up the horrible realities of what it has done to the marine ecosystem, the health of US citizens along the coastal region, and the countless lives that have been destroyed.

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POLITICS | OCTOBER 8, 2010

Environment Chief Caught in the Campaign Crossfire

By STEPHEN POWER

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson isn't on any ballots this November. But in some parts of the country, she might as well be.

Ms. Jackson's agency is becoming a foil for congressional candidates across the country. In South Dakota, Republican Kristi Noem has called for Ms. Jackson's resignation, citing the EPA's inaction on a request from ethanol producers to allow more ethanol in gasoline.

In Arkansas, embattled Democratic Sen. Blanche Lincoln is blasting Ms. Jackson's agency for promulgating "overreaching, burdensome" regulations on pesticides used by farmers.

In these states and others, Ms. Jackson's EPA has become a focal point of the argument about the role of federal regulation in the economy. Environmental and public-health groups that form an important part of the Democratic Party's constituency say a vigorous EPA is vital when Congress is deadlocked on environmental policy issues such as climate change.

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Reuters

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson testifies before a panel on the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in September.

But for Republicans and for some Democrats, the EPA is a symbol of a government that does too much and discourages job-creating investments. "It represents government out of control," said Rep. Sanford Bishop, (D., Ga.) when asked to describe his constituents' view of the agency.

Ms. Jackson has emerged as one of the Obama administration's most energetic regulators. During the past 18 months, the agency has proposed 42 "significant" regulations, according to OMB Watch, a left-leaning watchdog group. That compares with 16 in the first 18 months of the EPA during the George W. Bush administration. The government defines regulations as "significant" if they have an annual impact on the economy of $100 million or more or meet certain other criteria, such as raising new legal issues or interfering with other agencies' actions.

The new rules seek to reduce ozone pollution from factories and cars; coal ash waste from power plants; storm-water runoff from construction sites; greenhouse-gas emissions from cars; and mercury emissions from industrial boilers.

Ms. Jackson has noted that past warnings about the economic toll of environmental regulation have often overestimated the costs. When Congress debated legislation in 1990 to curb acid rain, EPA studies estimated the legislation's annual costs at between $2.7 and $4 billion a year. A decade later, an EPA analysis determined that the 1990 law cost $1 billion to $2 billion.

"We want an EPA that is working to protect our families and the places where we live, work and play—not protecting big polluters and the status quo," a spokesman for Ms. Jackson said.

The agency's critics say they are also looking out for ordinary Americans. In West Virginia and Virginia, Democratic Reps. Nick Rahall and Rick Boucher, respectively, are playing up their efforts to stop EPA rules that they say will kill mining jobs.

Mr. Rahall's district is the focus of a particularly controversial EPA decision. In March, the agency proposed quashing a water permit needed for a coal-mining project there that the Bush administration approved three years ago. It's the first time in the EPA's 40-year history that the agency has proposed vetoing a water permit after it was issued.

An EPA spokesman said the project "involves harmful impacts on the environment, wildlife and water quality on an enormous scale."

Not all political candidates are attacking the EPA. In California's 44th district, Democrat Bill Hedrick has criticized incumbent Republican Rep. Ken Calvert for supporting legislation to block the EPA from regulating greenhouse-gas emissions. Mr. Calvert said he voted for the legislation "to give Congress, regulators and stakeholders two years to develop a workable solution that protects American jobs."

Ms. Jackson, meanwhile, is trying to soothe some of her critics. She met last month with ethanol producers, assuring them she was still considering their request to allow more ethanol in gasoline.

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Frisco battery recycling plant to test residents' blood levels for lead

06:50 AM CDT on Friday, October 8, 2010

By VALERIE WIGGLESWORTH and MATTHEW HAAG / The Dallas Morning News
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Frisco's city manager said Thursday that a battery recycling plant in the city's center would soon start testing residents' blood for lead.

The decades-old plant operated by Exide Technologies Inc., which crushes and recycles used automotive and industrial batteries, has some of the highest lead emissions in the south-central United States. Lead can be toxic even in minute amounts and can cause health problems, including brain damage, learning disabilities and behavioral issues.

Details about the blood testing program, a joint effort between the company and the city, are still being worked out.

City Manager George Purefoy said Frisco has no oversight of the plant but is pushing Exide to reduce emissions. He traveled to Atlanta three weeks ago to meet with the company's new president, and city and company officials now talk regularly. He said he believes the company is "trying to make a good-faith effort."

Exide spokeswoman Susan Jaramillo said the company plans to bring the Frisco plant into compliance with the new, more stringent standard for lead as soon as possible.

The company has already asked state regulators for permission to reduce the plant's permit limits for lead. The idea is to reduce the size of what's now a 2.4-square-mile area around the plant that is not expected to meet the new lead requirements.

A spokesman with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality said that the company's permit application is still under review.

The announcement of the blood tests and the permit change request come a week before the EPA is expected to designate an area of Frisco that includes City Hall, Pizza Hut Park and several subdivisions as not meeting the new standard for lead. The area is expected to be one of only 17 such designations in the country, but few of them are in as densely populated cities.

Purefoy announced the changes in a letter to citizens posted on the city's website Thursday. He said he released the letter because many residents had expressed concern about the plant to the city, which has been working on air-quality monitor locations and a health risk study. The letter also was intended to put pressure on Exide to look at new pollution controls that could significantly reduce the plant's emissions.

Purefoy specifically pointed to results that Dallas-based RSR Corp. has seen at its lead smelter in City of Industry, Calif. Company officials have reported lead emissions declining by 99 percent. It also saw significant drops in a host of other compounds.

Jaramillo said Exide is looking into the technology.

"They run different operations, and it's unclear whether it will produce the same results for Exide as it did for RSR," she said.

In his letter, Purefoy also said TCEQ is waiting for the EPA's soil test results before starting its health risk study. Soil samples were taken from 13 sites, including Frisco High School, Frisco ISD's childhood development center and the Frisco Police Department.

Purefoy's letter states: "The city's intent is to bring to bear all its efforts and resources to assure that the Exide plant is the most environmentally advanced plant in the country or lead the efforts to stop its operation."

Osakis, MN
Osakis Review

Published October 08 2010

Blood lead poisoning is a major preventable environmental health problem

This year, October 3 through 9 has been declared Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Week in Minnesota by Governor Tim Pawlenty.

Children who are exposed to lead and have elevated blood lead levels can face many potential health issues. Even at relatively low levels, lead can slow a child's growth, damage hearing, cause behavior problems like a shortened attention span and aggressive behavior, decrease hand-eye coordination, and cause learning disabilities.

In 1995, more than 4000 children under the age of 6 in Minnesota had elevated blood lead levels, but by 2009, that number dropped to 778 due to efforts to reduce lead exposures for children and get more children screened, tested, and treated. This number reflects the 94,972 Minnesota children less than 6 years of age had blood lead tests, which is only 24% of the 397,581 eligible children in Minnesota. In Todd County, there were 6 children with elevated blood levels in 2009. In 1995, there were 18 children with elevated blood levels. The 2010 Public Health goal is to eliminate blood lead poisoning.

This year, October 3 through 9 has been declared Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Week in Minnesota by Governor Tim Pawlenty. During this week Todd County Public Health will join a number of public health agencies and community partners around Minnesota to build awareness of childhood lead poisoning. The aim is to get parents, health care providers, housing authorities, building and construction interests, educators, and others working together to prevent children from being exposed to lead in the environment. October is National Lead Poisoning Prevention Month. Each year 250,000 children are diagnosed with lead poisoning in the United States.

It is estimated that there are 1.2 million homes in Minnesota that have lead paint in them, increasing the families risk for lead poisoning. There is an increased risk for blood lead poisoning if you live in or spend time in a home built before 1950, or a home built before 1978 that has had repair or remodeling done while you were there. Other sources of lead include toys, plumbing, chalk, non-commercial cosmetics, folk remedies, non-commercially prepared pottery and leaded-crystal, and some foods.

Children and pregnant women of low income families are three times more likely to have elevated blood lead levels. Routine testing should be done for children of all ages whose parent expresses a concern about the child's lead exposure, has moved from a major metropolitan area or other country, or is 1 year and 2 years old, as well as up to 6 years old if the child lives in a metropolitan area, receives WIC, or is on a Minnesota Health Care Program (MHCP) such as Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare.

Pregnant women should be tested if they have an occupation, hobby, or other activities working with lead, have a craving or accidentally eat clay soil, plaster, paint chips, or other non-food items, have had a water test and found lead in their drinking water, live in or spend time in a home built before 1950, or a home built before 1978 that has had repair or remodeling done while you were there, use non-commercial cosmetics, folk remedies, non-commercially prepared pottery, or leaded-crystal.

If you are concerned your child may be at risk for lead poisoning, consult Todd County Public Health to assist you in determining your child's lead exposure and whether you need to have your child tested. They can also help you learn how to reduce and prevent lead exposures in your home or neighborhood.

More information on lead is available at the Minnesota Department of Health's website at www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/lead or call Todd County Public Health at (320) 732-4440 or Toll-Free 1-800-953-4440.

Tags: daily updates, lead poisoning, news, health

Bloomberg

Exxon Works to Halt Hydrogen Sulfide Leak at Refinery

By Leela Landress and Aaron Clark - Oct 7, 2010

Exxon Mobil Corp. is working to halt a leak of compressed gas containing hydrogen sulfide at its Chalmette refinery in Louisiana that began Oct. 4, according to the company and state police.

"Chalmette refining is in the process of containing a leak of compressed flammable gas which contains small amounts of hydrogen sulfide," Kevin Allexon, a spokesman for Exxon, said today in an e-mail. "We are actively mitigating the odors associated with this release, which are not considered harmful at the levels being monitored."

A contractor died at the refinery late yesterday, Allexon said in the e-mail, and the company is investigating. He didn't say whether the death was related to the leak.

The contractor was an employee of Team Industrial Services Inc., said Butch Bouchard, a spokesman for the company. He said Team Industrial "cannot confirm the cause of death."

The leak was reported about 11:20 p.m. local time Oct. 4, Louisiana State Police Sergeant Markus Smith said in a telephone interview. The leak is from a clamp that had been used to halt a prior leak, he said. The clamp is at a process unit that was not identified, according to a police report.

Yesterday, workers used a "large water curtain to keep the vapors from going offsite," according to the police report, Smith said. Monitors outside the refinery haven't detected hydrogen sulfide, he said. A special flange needed to isolate the damaged area was expected to arrive from Houston yesterday, Smith said.

OSHA Investigating

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration has opened an investigation into the accident, Juan Rodriguez, a spokesman, said today in a telephone interview.

Hydrogen sulfide is "extremely hazardous," according to a fact sheet from the Occupational Safety & Health Administration. At low concentrations the gas can "irritate the eyes, nose, throat and

respiratory system."

Exxon identified the leak late Oct. 4 and notified the appropriate authorities, according to Allexon. "Odor issues prompted some inquiries from residents, so we placed a message on the community hot line" early yesterday, he said. Monitoring "indicates no offsite impacts, save for some odor issues."

Previous Emission

The leak comes about a month after the refinery released 19 tons of spent catalyst when a power failure caused several units to shut, according to a report from state regulators. More than 100,000 pounds of sulfur dioxide were also released, according to the Sept. 13 letter from the refinery to the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality.

The unit that emitted the catalyst dust into a local neighborhood was the fluid catalytic converter sox scrubber, Tim Beckstrom, a spokesman for the DEQ, said last month.

The spent catalyst, a claylike powdery material, is a by- product of the refining process and isn't dangerous at low levels, Exxon said after the release.

A material safety datasheet that Exxon submitted to the state after the accident says clothes and shoes that touch catalyst should be decontaminated or thrown away, and "if prolonged or repeated contact is likely, chemical-resistant gloves are recommended."

"At the expected levels of exposure, this powder is not considered harmful to people, animals or plants," Allexon said Sept. 8. "As with any dust or particulate matter, prolonged exposure may cause irritation to skin, eyes and the respiratory tract."

Exxon said Aug. 26 that it would stop operating some units at Chalmette and eliminate 70 jobs. Exxon declined to say which units would be shut. Wayne J. Landry, council chairman of St. Bernard Parish, said Aug. 27 that the refinery would halt operation of a coker and a hydrocracker. Chalmette is in St. Bernard Parish, adjacent to New Orleans.

The refinery is a joint venture with Petroleos de Venezuela SA and has a capacity of 200,700 barrels a day, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

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Everything New Orleans

Worker dies at Chalmette refinery; DEQ, State Police responding to gas leak

Published: Thursday, October 07, 2010, 7:00 PM Updated: Thursday, October 07, 2010, 7:02 PM

Chris Kirkham, The Times-Picayune

A contract worker at Chalmette Refining LLC's Chalmette plant died Wednesday night, authorities said.

David Grunfeld, The Times-Picayune archive

Chalmette Refining was photographed in December 2009.

The worker's death comes as State Police and **the Department of Environmental Quality** are responding to a hydrogen sulfide gas leak at the St. Bernard Parish plant that has been ongoing since late Monday.

The St. Bernard Parish Sheriff's Office identified the man as Gregory Starkey, 33, of Roseland. The Sheriff's Office said he was repairing a pipe leaking hydrogen sulfide gas. Starkey worked for Team Industrial Services of Harahan, the Sheriff's Office said.

State Police spokesman Markus Smith also said Starkey was working in the vicinity of the gas leak. Smith said it was unclear Thursday evening whether the cause of death was exposure or was caused by pre-existing medical problems.

Dr. Bryan Bertucci, the St. Bernard Parish coroner, said a cause of death had not been determined Thursday evening. He expected to know Friday.

Rodney Mallett, a spokesman for the state Department of Environmental Quality, said the leak happened at the site of a previous leak that had been covered by a metal clamp. He said the agency has set up air monitoring at the perimeter of the refinery and that sampling has shown no readings of hydrogen sulfide outside of the property.

The company is spraying water at the site of the leak to dilute the gas, said Chalmette Refining spokesman Will Hinson.

"All the agencies have been notified, and we're actively mitigating any odors that anybody may smell out there," Hinson said. "It's not considered harmful at the levels tested by the monitors."

Hydrogen sulfide typically has a noxious, rotten smell and can cause eye irritation and shortness of breath during exposure to small concentrations. In high concentrations, typically in the workplace, exposure to hydrogen sulfide can be fatal.

News of the gas leak did not become public until after the worker's death was revealed Thursday. Hinson said the refinery notified all the relevant state and local agencies, but he said the nondetectable levels of hydrogen sulfide readings at the fence line did not warrant notification to the community.

The leak comes after a separate accident at the refinery a month ago, where **19 tons of a white powdery substance called spent catalyst were released** on Labor Day. The refinery initially reported to the public that only 1 ton of the substance was released.

The Louisiana Bucket Brigade, a local environmental group that focuses on industrial pollution, noted in a report released last year that Chalmette Refining has the second-most reports of accidental releases of any refinery in the state, behind the ExxonMobil refinery in Baton Rouge.

Anne Rolfes, director of the Bucket Brigade, said the most recent leak speaks to bigger safety problems at the Chalmette refinery.

"One of the most revealing issues is that the problem came from a pre-existing leak that they had put a clamp on, and that clamp started to leak," Rolfes said. "It's really important to see the facility in context of these accidents."

*Chris Kirkham can be reached at **ckirkham@timespicayune.com** or 504.826.3321.*

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Groups: NM cougar hunt quota is too high

Email Print

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — A revised plan by the state Game and Fish Department would allow more cougars to be hunted and could push the animal to the brink of extinction in New Mexico, some environmentalists claim.

The state Game Commission is set to make a final decision on hunting limits for both cougars and bears during an Oct. 28 meeting in Ruidoso. The proposals garnered much attention during public meetings last summer.

WildEarth Guardians and Animal Protection of New Mexico contend the department's cougar proposal represents more than a 100 percent increase over current hunting quotas, which stand at about 490 cougars from New Mexico's various game management units. For females, the quota would go from 126 to more than 380.

"These hunt proposals, with their extreme prejudice against females, have the potential to bring cougar populations to the brink of extinction in New Mexico," Wendy Keefover-Ring of WildEarth Guardians said in a statement.

The Game and Fish Department maintains that increased hunts would address depredation and safety issues in many areas, while still leaving New Mexico with a sustainable population.

Based on public comments received over the last few months, department officials said they added language to the proposed rule that would require the agency to review cougar and bear harvest information each year along with population trends so commissioners could determine whether hunting quotas need to be changed for upcoming seasons.

"There are lots of checks and balances built into this stuff," said Marty Frentzel, a spokesman for the agency.

He added that the agency's director can also alter hunting limits for any species in one direction or the other depending on what effects are being seen in the field.

The revised proposal also includes a provision that would require all cougar hunters to take an online identification course prior to hunting the animals.

Frentzel said the agency believes there is a healthy population of cougars in New Mexico and it can withstand a higher harvest.

The environmental groups argue that the agency isn't being forthcoming with information about how it calculated cougar populations. They have submitted a public records request seeking the study used in determining cougar numbers.

Keefover-Ring said department officials have "a huge public accountability problem."

The department's proposal aims to reduce the estimated cougar population to between 3,100 and nearly 4,400. Officials recommend reducing the population by about 5 percent per year over the next four years in eight areas. Elsewhere, the population would be managed to keep numbers stable.

The Grand Island Independent

News > Ag

Print Page

Ethanol summit brings companies together to work on solutions to problems

Published: Thursday, October 7, 2010 9:39 PM CDT

From government environmental regulations to export restrictions facing Nebraska's 2 billion-gallon-plus annual ethanol industry were among issues raised on Thursday at the first ever Nebraska Ethanol Summit in Grand Island.

Representatives from Nebraska's 24 operating ethanol plants and industry officials gathered at the Bosselman Conference Center for the summit that featured speakers covering a wide range of ethanol-related topics, from health and environmental regulatory issues to training and job opportunities in this home-grown Nebraska industry that directly employs more than 4,000 people in rural areas of the state.

Nebraska is the nation's second largest ethanol-producing state, with 24 operating plants producing more than 2 billion gallons of ethanol using more than 600 million bushels of corn. The summit reflected the technological expertise of an industry that has had a presence in Nebraska for 40 years.

"For those people who think that alternative fuels just happened yesterday, that's not true," said Loran Schmit, executive director of the Association of Nebraska Ethanol Producers, one of the sponsors of the summit and the group that represents the state's ethanol plants.

With foresight to envision what Nebraska's potential was in the ethanol industry, Schmit said, the Nebraska Legislature created the Nebraska Ethanol Board in 1972 to help guide the state through the process of developing this alternative fuel industry using a commodity (corn) that grew in abundance in the state.

Schmit said the summit was designed to discuss problems facing the state's ethanol industry in an open and frank matter in an effort to find solutions to them.

The concept of growing the ethanol industry in Nebraska was simple, according to Schmit: Find new markets for state corn farmers. Also, at the same time, lead in gasoline was being phased out and ethanol was a logical fuel additive with positive environmental and economical benefits.

"It was about creating a better environment for the people and a better economic picture for the people of Nebraska," he said. "I think we have accomplished all of those goals."

And with 40 years of experience, Nebraska is now not only a world leader in the ethanol industry, but one of the top producers in the world of ethanol behind Brazil and Iowa.

But it continues to be a battle for the ethanol industry as Schmit said the oil industry isn't going to easily surrender 10 percent of its market to the ethanol industry and possibly 15 percent of that industry when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency approves a 15 percent blend of ethanol in gasoline without a fight.

"That is perfectly logical for the oil industry and I wouldn't expect them to say, 'You guys can have it,'" he said. "They are in the business of selling petroleum and they see ethanol as a competitor. It's amazing that we almost have 10 percent of that market today and we are heading toward a larger percentage."

But Schmit said ethanol has become an integral part of the nation's energy strategy.

"If we didn't have ethanol, we would have to invent something else," he said. "I think it would be more expensive. It would not be a local product. It would be one that we would have to import. And, we would be paying more for gasoline."

In other words, not only does the ethanol industry enrich Nebraska's economy through value-added agriculture, but it also saves consumers thousands of dollars annually of reduced energy costs as that 10 percent of gasoline that ethanol replaces would more than likely have been imported from outside the U.S. at a greater cost to the nation's economy, creating a more lopsided negative balance of trade that would have ended up only increasing the national debt even more.

While the ethanol industry faces challenges from increasing government regulations and the loss of government incentives, what concerns Schmit the most and is an immediate challenge to the economic viability of the ethanol industry is the rising cost of corn.

Several years ago, he said, speculators drove up the price of corn to above $7 per bushel when there was no economic incentive, such as supply and demand, to justify that increase. That created a maelstrom that nearly sucked the ethanol industry into oblivion, along with threatening the economic viability of Nebraska's livestock industry as feed makes up more than 70 percent of the cost of raising livestock.

"I'm concerned as a corn producer that corn is at $4.34 per bushel," he said. "We have record carryovers, we have a record crop, and record quality. I don't know what drives that market today. I'm really a bit apprehensive that it may be some of the same speculative efforts that were involved two years ago. That can be detrimental to the industry, detrimental to Nebraska farmers, detrimental to the livestock industry and we have to address those issues."

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October 15

October 7, 2010

A Fishing Paradise Gains a Deadly Reputation

By JAMES C. McKINLEY Jr.

HOUSTON — For decades, Falcon Lake was known primarily as an anglers' paradise, a tranquil reservoir straddling the border with Mexico where a clever fisherman could catch enormous largemouth bass. These days, however, the lake is developing a reputation for something else: piracy.

As a prolonged conflict between drug dealers and the government has eroded civil order in Mexico, gangs of armed thugs in speedboats have begun robbing fishermen and tourists on the lake.

Last week, gunmen in three boats reportedly shot and killed an American as he and his wife toured the lake on Jet Skis.

The shooting has strained tense relations between the Texas authorities and the Mexican government. A week after David M. Hartley, 30, was reported shot in the head, the Mexican authorities have yet to find a body or any trace of his watercraft.

On Wednesday, Gov. Rick Perry, a Republican running for re-election, sharply criticized the Mexican government as being slow to investigate the episode. He also denounced the Obama administration as not having provided more National Guard troops to patrol the border.

"Frankly, these two presidents need to get together with their secretaries of state and say, 'What are we going to do about this?' " Mr. Perry said.

Mr. Hartley's wife, Tiffany, has complained that the Mexican police are not trying hard enough to find him, making teary appeals on a national morning news show and on local television stations.

The Mexican Foreign Relations Ministry, meanwhile, released a communiqué saying that the authorities in Tamaulipas state had "stepped up their actions with the support of specialized personnel, boats and helicopters."

Ruben Dario Rios, a spokesman for the Tamaulipas state police, said in an interview that officers continued to dredge the lake and scan the water from a helicopter but had yet to find any trace of the missing man.

The Texas Rangers have warned Americans to keep to the United States side of the 60-mile-long reservoir, which was formed in 1953 when the Rio Grande was dammed. The Border Patrol and the Coast Guard have increased their patrols on the lake in response to Mr. Hartley's disappearance, federal officials said.

The shooting was the latest in a string of attacks by pirates on the lake that began on April 30. The gangs carry AK-47s and sometimes claim to be Mexican federal police or American game wardens. They have sometimes hijacked high-prowed boats favored by Mexican fishermen and used them to chase down Americans in bass boats, stealing their money at gunpoint.

The state police say the robbers are believed to be members of a drug gang, though it is unclear if the attacks are the work of one group or several.

On Sept. 30, Mr. Hartley and his wife had traveled on their Jet Skis to the village of Guerrero on the Mexican side of the lake to take photographs of an old church there, according to her father, Bob Young. Mr. Hartley, a regional manager for Calfrac Well Services, was a history buff and wanted to see the landmark, which lies near a finger of water well inside Mexico.

Originally from Colorado, the couple had just finished a two-year assignment in Reynosa, Mexico, and had moved to McAllen, Tex., four months ago to escape the violence. They were only days away from moving again, this time back to Colorado, and the trip to see the church was a last hurrah on their Jet Skis, Mr. Young said.

"He told her, 'We might as well go and check out this old church and take the Jet Skis out one more time,' " Mr. Young said. "It was just a fluke. Wrong place, wrong time."

As they started back from the church, Mrs. Hartley said in interviews, gunmen in three small boats raced toward them from shore. The Hartleys tried to speed away, but the gunmen opened fire and Mr. Hartley was shot in the head.

She turned around and tried to haul her unconscious husband onto her watercraft but was not strong enough. "I tried pulling him up, and you cannot imagine how awful it was not being able to help him," she told ABC News.

Mr. Young said his daughter was in the water with her husband when the gunmen pulled up in boats and pointed a gun at her. She begged them not to shoot, he said, and they retreated to shore. A few minutes later, some of them began to return. She fled to the United States side of the lake and called the police, according to 911 tapes.

The state attorney in Tamaulipas, Marco Antonio Guerrero, initially questioned Mrs. Hartley's story in an interview with The McAllen Monitor, saying the Mexican police were "not certain that the incident happened the way they are telling us."

But Sheriff Sigifredo Gonzalez of Zapata County, on the Texas side of the lake, has said that Mrs. Hartley's story is credible and that the assault is in keeping with other recent robberies, some of which happened in the same part of the lake.

On April 30, for example, two boats carrying five tourists who wanted photographs of the Guerrero church were robbed at gunpoint by four heavily tattooed men in a fishing boat who identified themselves as "federales." They demanded cash and even asked, "Where are the drugs?"

A week later, on May 6, three fishermen were robbed at gunpoint near Salado Island. On May 16, another group of boaters was robbed, again by armed men in a fishing boat on the United States side of the reservoir.

More recently, a gang of pirates in a small boat, with "Game Wardin" spelled out in duct tape, tried to stop a Texas fisherman, the police said. The Texan figured the misspelled word meant

they were not really game wardens and outran them, the police said.

The drama surrounding Mr. Hartley's disappearance and apparent death has rapidly become fodder for both sides in the governor's race.

The Democratic challenger, Bill White, a former Houston mayor, said the shooting was a consequence of too little support from the state for sheriffs and police departments on the border.

Mr. Perry, meanwhile, reiterated his demand for more troops and federal agents on the border, pointing a finger of blame at the Obama administration.

The governor has also staunchly defended Mrs. Hartley against anyone who doubts her account, saying he finds such theories "really reprehensible."

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Notes from the Stunning Final Climate Leaders Meeting

1:00am EDT

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced last month that it would suspend its Climate Leaders program, which helped companies take greenhouse gas inventories, set emissions reduction goals, and share best practices.

The Climate Leaders' annual conference previously scheduled for this week ended up being the final meeting. I attended the event and left with the following observations.

It is pretty clear that the EPA has zero interest in receiving input from large companies about this program. Obviously there has been some change at the EPA level on how they want to work with large companies in voluntary programs.

The transition process to sunset this program seems rushed and amateurish. Some specifics of the program wind-down include:

- The EPA Climate Leaders website and brand logo will be retired in September 2011.
- The transition for existing companies has not been clearly worked out.
- The EPA plans to issue an RFP later this year looking for an NGO that could replace part of the program. Specifics of the RFP have not yet been finalized.

Large companies remain extremely frustrated. During the Q & A session, many large companies, including SC Johnson, DuPont, Merck, Ingersoll Rand and UPS, publicly expressed disappointment and frustration. Private conversations were even more heated. No one spoke publicly in support of the EPA decision or the wind-down process.

Gina McCarthy, assistant administrator of EPA's Office of Air and Radiation, was blunt and unrelenting with Climate Leaders partners: "Our relationship with you must change."

The EPA has not given clear answers on the reasons behind the program's termination. McCarthy said at one point it was budget, but then said later she and the EPA have plenty of budget for programs that have high impact, implying that this one did not. She left after her talk and some Q&A.

A few of the many issues companies raised:

- NGOs are not a replacement for the credibility that comes with an EPA program.
- What happens with publicly stated goals? Who will recognize the goals?
- How do we message this transition internally? Companies currently don't have good messaging, especially since the reasons for the program termination are so vague.
- Loss of face or credibility internally for companies, since many sustainability leaders justified budget requests in anticipation of public recognition for meeting GHG reduction goals. This no longer seems to be the case.

• Mandatory reporting requirements are different than voluntary reporting. Many invested in voluntary reporting to reduce future mandatory reporting costs.

Companies feel burnt. Companies were burnt.

I think the EPA could have done a variety of things to help ease the transition, such as allowing existing program members to use the EPA Climate Leaders logo for the next five years as they achieve their reduction goals, increasing service fees for the technical consulting, provide more time on the transition, etc.

But, it seemed very obvious to me, from McCarthy's blunt comments to the absolutely deflated EPA Climate Leaders program team sitting on the dais after McCarthy left, that the EPA has zero interest in maintaining a partner relationship or even a working relationship with the large companies.

Executives from SC Johnson, Merck, and Cummings were very articulate in their feedback. One company said they traveled to the conference in the hope of sharing ideas on how to keep the program going, but this is not an option.

Everyone, including the EPA, agrees that the program was very successful for the last eight years. Many also agree that the EPA decision is baffling, especially when you consider President Obama's public support for addressing climate change and this week's announcement that solar panels would be installed at the White House. No clear reasons have been provided.

The EPA now has a very different approach to how it wants to work with businesses. Buyer beware in participating in future voluntary EPA programs.

Paul Baier is vice president of advisory services at Groom Energy and senior contributor at GreenBiz.com.

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Posted: Oct 7th, 2010

NanoScale Applies Military Know-How To Chinese Drywall Crisis

(*Nanowerk News*) NanoScale Corporation (NanoScale®), a leader in advanced chemistry products, services, and technologies, today announced an expansion of its focused program to apply its chemical technology platform for use in combating the corrosive chemicals and noxious odors associated with Chinese drywall (sic. CDW, Corrosive Drywall, Contaminated Drywall).

The Company's core chemical technology platform was originally developed in conjunction with the Department of Defense, National Science Foundation, U.S. EPA and other government agencies through $30M in research contracts for destruction of chemical warfare agents such as Sarin and Mustard gasses. In June 2010, the Company was awarded a multi-year supply contract by the U.S. Army for the M295 surface decontamination kit that enables soldiers to rapidly and effectively decontaminate their equipment.

NanoScale has adapted its proprietary and patented technology for convenient use by real estate owners, occupants, and industry professionals to irreversibly capture and destroy indoor air pollutants – reactive sulfur compounds and other corrosive and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) – off-gassing from the contaminated drywall. Safe and green, NanoScale's chemistry is non-toxic and is based on naturally occurring earth minerals such a zinc and magnesium oxide. The by-products of The OdorKlenz Process® are environmentally benign.

Over one hundred thousand homes, across more than 39 states, have become afflicted with a toxic chemical and odor problem caused by 500 million pounds of defective Chinese drywall imported and installed, primarily during the 2005-2007 building boom. Defective drywall has been identified as the source of emissions of hazardous sulfur-containing chemicals that are corroding air handling systems, plumbing, electrical systems, and appliances. Damages are estimated to range from $15 billion to $25 billion. Building industry experts estimate that it will cost, on average, $100,000 per home to replace the corrosive drywall and damaged infrastructure.

"Our proven technology and OdorKlenz® products can be of immediate assistance in restoring livability to homes contaminated with CDW while homeowners await total remediation," said Aaron Madison, Chief Operating Officer at NanoScale.

Many CDW homeowners cannot currently afford a total remediation, "This is a life saving device, because my house was unbearable to live in – not to mention the fears about our health ... My 18 month old son had a constant dry cough, sneezing and wheezing before using the cartridge, but not anymore since the use of it. Before using the cartridge, it was difficult to stay in my house. Now, we are able to breathe again. This is an excellent product – it works every time," said M. Angela W., Port St. Lucie, FL.

The Company has assembled a team of technical representatives and is actively expanding its sales and service efforts in the Gulf Coast region. The OdorKlenz Process has been successfully implemented in homes in the Sun City Center, Florida area and throughout southern Florida. OdorKlenz installations are underway in conjunction with the Rebuilding New Orleans Project.

NanoScale Corporation develops and provides high performance advanced chemistry materials and

related services to Customers worldwide. The Company holds a substantial intellectual property portfolio which includes its patented NanoActive®, FAST-ACT®, ChemKlenz®, OdorKlenz®, and SpillKlenz™ product lines and systems. NanoScale produces and sells a wide variety of NanoActive brand nanocrystalline materials in forms that include dry powders, granules, and liquid suspensions. FAST-ACT, ChemKlenz, and OdorKlenz Systems are sold for the prevention, containment, elimination, and remediation of toxic and noxious chemicals, odors, and related applications. Additional information on the Company and its capabilities is available at www.NanoScaleCorp.com and www.OdorKlenz.com.

msnbc.com

Wave of toxic sludge reaches the Danube River

Spill is 'one of the top three environmental disasters in Europe in the last 20 or 30 years,' activist says

Bela Szandelszky / AP
A rescue team searches for missing bodies possibly washed away by toxic mud near the village of Kolontar, Hungary on Thursday.

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updated 1 hour 56 minutes ago

KOLONTAR, Hungary — Toxic red sludge that burst out of a metals plant reservoir — killing at least four people and causing serious burns to others — reached the mighty River Danube Thursday.

The European Union and environmental officials had feared an environmental catastrophe affecting half a dozen nations if the red sludge, a waste product of making aluminum, contaminated the 1,775-mile Danube, the second longest in Europe.

However an Hungarian emergency official said Thursday that no immediate damage to the river was evident.

The reservoir break Monday disgorged a toxic torrent into local creeks that flow into waterways connected to the Danube.

Creeks in Kolontar, the closest town to the spill site and about 45 miles south of the Danube, were swollen ochre red Wednesday and villagers said they were devoid of fish.

The red sludge reached the western branch of the Danube early Thursday, Hungarian rescue agency spokesman Tibor Dobson told the state MTI news agency.

He did not address concerns that the caustic slurry might contain toxic metals, but said its pH content had been reduced to the point where it was unlikely to cause further damage to the environment.

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Story: EU to Hungary: Don't let toxic sludge reach Danube

Dobson said the pH content, which officials earlier said was at a highly alkaline 13 on a scale of zero to 14, was now under 10 and no dead fish had been spotted where the slurry was entering the Danube.

The National Disaster Management Directorate, in a separate statement, said the pH value was at 9.3 and constantly decreasing. Normal ph levels for surface water range from 6.5 to 8.5.

Waterways devastated
But the sludge devastated the less mighty Marcal River.

"Life in the Marcal River has been extinguished," Dobson told The Associated Press, referring to the 25-mile stretch of the river that carried the red waste from Kolontar into the Raba River, which then flows into the Danube.

He said emergency crews were pouring plaster and acetic acid — vinegar — into the Raba-Danube meeting point to lower the slurry's pH value.

"The main effort is now being concentrated on the Raba and the Danube," he said. "That's what has to be saved."

Dobson said the lack of immediate environmental damage to the Danube or Raba was "by no means a victory declaration," cautioning that dead fish could still turn up shortly.

South of Hungary, the Danube flows through Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Moldova before emptying into the Black Sea.

Daily water tests
At the Croatian village of Batina, the first site after the Danube leaves Hungary, experts were taking water samples Thursday which they will repeat daily for the next week, the state-run news agency HINAS reported.

In Romania, water levels were reported safe Thursday, with testing being carried out every three hours, said Romanian Waters spokeswoman Ana Maria Tanase.

She said the Danube water had a pH of 8.5, which was within normal levels, but tests were being done to check for heavy metals.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban visited

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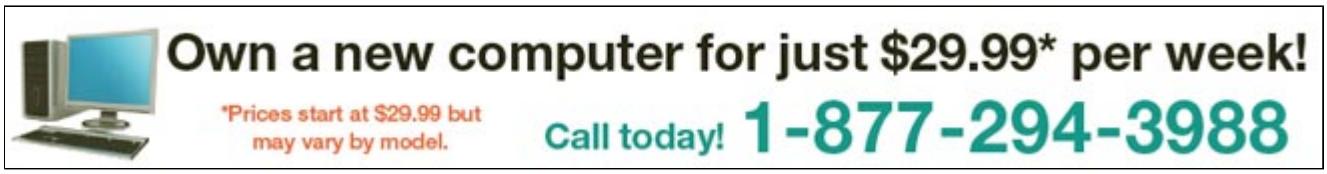

msnbc.com

the three villages coated by the red sludge Thursday and declared the worst-hit area a write-off, saying he sees "no sense" in rebuilding in the same location.

"It is difficult to find the words. Had this happened at night, everybody would be dead," Orban told reporters.

He reiterated that the disaster could not have been due to natural causes.

"This is an unprecedented ecological catastrophe in Hungary. Human error is more than likely. The wall (of the reservoir) did not disintegrate in a minute. This should have been detected."

Local officials said 34 homes in Kolontar were unlivable. However, furious residents said the disaster had destroyed the whole community of 800 by making their land valueless.

'A dead town'

Angry villagers gathered outside the mayor's office late Wednesday and berated a senior official of MAL Rt., the Hungarian Aluminum Production and Trade Company that owns the Ajkai Timfoldgyar plant, demanding compensation.

"The whole settlement should be bulldozed into the ground," bellowed Janos Potza. "There's no point for anyone to go back home."

"Those who can, will move out of Kolontar. From now on, this is a dead town," fumed Beata Gasko Monek.

Others relived their experience in the deluge.

"I hung in the sludge for 45 minutes... It had a strong current that almost swept me away but I managed to hang on to a strong piece of wood of the pigsty," another Kolontor resident, Etelka Stump, said. "But I could hardly breathe because that air, that smell, that froth really hit me."

Disaster crews, military personnel and villagers continued to clear away rubble and search for the missing people.

It is still not known why part of the reservoir collapsed. Authorities have ordered a criminal inquiry into the accident, which injured 120 and left three people missing in addition to the four known to have died. It is estimated the torrent included 35 million cubic feet of toxic waste.

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A spokeswoman for the National Police said investigators would look into whether on-the-job carelessness was a factor.

The huge reservoir, more than 1,000 feet by 1,500 feet, was no longer leaking and a triple-tiered protective wall was being built around its damaged section. Guards have been posted at the breach to give an early warning in case of any new emergency.

Water supplies may be affected

The sludge spill is "one of the top three environmental disasters in Europe in the last 20 or 30 years," said Herwit Schuster, a spokesman for Greenpeace International.

The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube, which manages the river and its tributaries, said the sludge spill could trigger long-term damaging effects for both wildlife and humans.

"It is a very serious accident and has potential implications for other countries," Philip Weller, the group's executive secretary, said from Brussels.

Weller said factories and towns along the Danube may have to shut down their water intake systems. He said large fish in the Danube could ingest any heavy metals carried downstream, potentially endangering people who eat them.

Red sludge is a byproduct of the refining of bauxite into alumina, the basic material for manufacturing aluminum.

Treated sludge is often stored in ponds where the water eventually evaporates, leaving behind a dried red clay-like soil.

Hungarian company officials have insisted the sludge is not considered hazardous waste, according to EU standards. The company has also rejected criticism that it should have taken more precautions at the reservoir.

Alumina plants are scattered around the world, with the 12 largest concentrated in Australia, Brazil and China. The plant in Hungary ranks 53rd in the world in production, according to industry statistics.

The Associated Press and Reuters contributed to this report.

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Houston Ship Channel reopens after accident

08:47 AM CDT on Thursday, October 7, 2010

The Associated Press

HOUSTON – The Houston Ship Channel was reopened Wednesday, restoring access to one of the nation's busiest ports three days after it was shut down by a barge accident, the Coast Guard said.

Vessels began moving through after an electric tower that had teetered over the waterway since the weekend accident was lowered safely to the ground.

The channel is the main point of access to the country's largest petroleum refineries. It pumps about $320 million a day into Texas' economy, a figure that includes all jobs associated with the waterway, according to the Coast Guard and the nonprofit trade group Greater Houston Port Bureau.

About 40 inbound and 24 outbound ships were delayed by the closure, U.S. Coast Guard Capt. Marcus Woodring said. He said it would take three or four more days to clear the backlog.

The channel leads to the Port of Houston, the country's leader in foreign waterborne tonnage and imports and second in U.S. export tonnage and total tonnage.

"There were obviously losses because there's a cost associated with operating a ship," Woodring said. "But it's very difficult to determine exactly what the economic impact is going to be."

Woodring said assessing the financial loss isn't as simple as multiplying $320 million by three, as some have tried to do, since so many variables are in play. The refineries continued to operate and truckers were able to transport cargo already in the port, he said.

Greater Houston Port Bureau spokesman John Smith said the closure was a temporary setback, much like what could occur during a hurricane or bad fog.

"The thing that's important to remember here is these vessels are coming from Japan, the Bahamas or somewhere – they're not going to turn around and go home," Smith said.

"If you look at the entirety of the month of October, the economic impact will not be that significant," he added. "It's just a matter of sifting through everything."

Any costs would be passed along in a trickle-down effect, he said.

The Associated Press

REUTERS

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Tribal Councils in U.S. and Canada Uniting Against Oil Sands Pipeline

9:21am EDT

Editor's Note: In late September, SolveClimate News reporter Elizabeth McGowan traveled to Nebraska to find out more about the Keystone XL pipeline that TransCanada plans to build to carry crude oil from the tar sands of Alberta to Gulf Coast refineries in Texas. This is the fifth in a series. Read Part 1, Part 2, Part 3 and Part 4 here.

LINCOLN, Neb.—Indigenous communities in Canada and the United States are singing the same tune in opposition to TransCanada's Keystone XL pipeline.

Last week, representatives from Canada's First Nations traveled to Washington, D.C., to explain how mining of tar sands for heavy crude oil is causing severe health problems and environmental upheaval across their communities. They've also joined forces with Native American groups in the U.S., calling on tribal councils along the Keystone XL's route to come out against the proposed pipeline.

Their concerns are being echoed on Capitol Hill by a pipeline safety organization that recently recommended to a congressional subcommittee specific safety measures to include in any potential pipeline legislation.

Calling All Tribal Councils

To build solidarity between Native Americans in the United States and First Nations in Canada, groups such as the nonprofit Indigenous Environmental Network are fostering cross-boundary bonds. The network already operates anti-tar-sands campaigns out of offices in Ottawa, Ontario and Bemidji, Minn.

Marty Cobenais, a member of the Red Lake Band of the Chippewa and a Minnesota-based organizer with the network, is doing much of the groundwork.

Tribes have varying reasons for rejecting the pipeline, Cobenais said, including that it potentially threatens the enormous Ogallala Aquifer or desecrates sacred lands on traditional homelands.

He estimates there are 15 to 20 tribal councils along the 1,375-mile section that starts in Montana and stretches through South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas.

"We want the Canada and U.S. tribes to stand in unity to fight this," Cobenais said, adding that this is a prime opportunity to stand behind President Obama's public statements about the need to wean the U.S. from fossil fuels. "We can't allow a divide-and-conquer mentality to prevail."

The tribes are rallying with green groups that are calling for pipeline standards to be upgraded and public notification to be expanded. Specifically, they are addressing safety issues, among them pipeline lifecycles, rules for abandonment, waivers for the thickness of steel pipes and maximum pumping pressure.

"When the pipeline can no longer be used, are they going to be removed?" Cobenais asked. "Right now abandoned pipelines are filled with what they call nontoxic chemicals, even though they haven't disclosed what they are. We want them taken out. Otherwise, you have toxic waste fields crisscrossing America."

For the most part, their demands are on the same page as the Pipeline Safety Trust, which monitors all types of pipeline issues. Officials from the nonprofit, based in Bellingham, Wash., are regularly called to Capitol Hill to offer testimony at oversight hearings.

Senate Testimony on Pipeline Safety

At a Sept. 28 Senate hearing assessing the San Bruno, Calif., explosion and other recent accidents, Pipeline Safety Trust vice president Rick Kessler laid out for a Commerce, Science and Transportation subcommittee seven specific measures a bill aimed at safety concerns should include to be comprehensive.

A former staffer for the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Kessler suggested requiring automatic shut-off valves for gas pipelines and emergency flow-restricting devices on hazardous liquid pipelines, improving the use of internal inspection devices, or "smart pigs," and upgrading leak detection capabilities.

He also recommended continuing grant money for communities to hire independent technical advisers, educating local governments on pipeline safety practices and clearly informing local residents where pipelines are located in their communities.

"The question isn't whether pipelines are a safe mode of transportation compared to other ways to move fuel. The real question is whether they are as safe as they could and should be, and the secondary question is whether they are being regulated in the most efficient, effective and protective manner they could or should be," Kessler told the senators. "Unfortunately, the answer to both questions is no."

In addition, Kessler recommended that senators consider five other measures. These included pushing state agencies on damage prevention from pipelines and ensuring the ability of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) to provide adequate inspections when pipelines are being constructed.

"One area where PHMSA could go even further in transparency would be a Web-based system that would allow public access to basic inspection information about specific pipelines," Kessler said in his testimony. "An inspection transparency system would allow the affected public to review when PHMSA and its state partners inspected particular pipelines, what types of inspections were performed, what was found and how any concerns were rectified."

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FROM ACADEMY AWARD® WINNER DANNY BOYLE

October 7, 2010

First Buyers of Nissan Leaf Get a Trunkful of Perks

By BILL VLASIC

Tax credits, rebate checks, personalized home visits, government giveaways — even customer service calls from top corporate executives.

The first all-electric car from a major auto company, the Nissan Leaf, arrives at dealerships in December, but thousands of Americans are already learning that going electric can come with perks like no other car purchase.

“It just keeps getting better and better,” said Justin McNaughton, among the 20,000 people who have reserved a Leaf. “My wife thinks it’s funny because at the end of the day, we’re just buying a car.”

Since Mr. McNaughton, a lawyer in Nashville, paid his $99 deposit, he has been bombarded with government incentives — promises of a $7,500 federal tax credit, a $2,500 cash rebate from the state of Tennessee, and a $3,000 home-charging unit courtesy of the Energy Department.

When he had questions about the Leaf, the answers came in a 40-minute telephone call from a senior manager in Nissan’s corporate planning department.

“You kind of feel like you’re one of the chosen people,” Mr. McNaughton said.

Precisely. It is all part of an unprecedented effort by federal, state and local governments to stimulate demand for cars that have zero tailpipe emissions — and Nissan’s pre-emptive bid to corner the all-electric market much the way that Toyota dominated the early hybrid market

with the Prius.

The government subsidies are shaving thousands of dollars off the Leaf's $32,780 sticker price, while other benefits are piling up, like free parking in some cities and the use of express lanes on highways usually reserved for cars with multiple passengers.

In Tennessee, where a Leaf assembly plant is being built, Leaf drivers will be able to charge their vehicles free at public charging stations on 425 miles of freeways that connect Nashville, Knoxville and Chattanooga.

"It's almost shocking how many subsidies are available on the Leaf," said Jeremy P. Anwyl, chief executive of the auto research Web site Edmunds.com. "We are putting a lot of money behind this technology."

Nissan expects the typical Leaf buyer to fit a highly desirable demographic: affluent, college-educated consumers in their mid-40s who are both environmentally sensitive and willing to take a chance that electric technology will be as safe and reliable as internal combustion engines.

Better still, about 85 percent of the people who have reserved a Leaf do not currently own a Nissan, giving the brand exposure to a new audience. Interest in the car has been so great that the company has stopped taking reservations for the initial production run — the Leaf is being built in Japan, with assembly at the new plant in Tennessee beginning in 2012 — but Nissan has plans to sell as many as 500,000 electric cars worldwide by 2013.

The Obama administration has made electric vehicles a centerpiece of its drive to reduce the nation's reliance on oil, and is pumping up subsidies with a goal of getting a million electric cars on the road by 2015. Proponents of electric cars also point to their zero tailpipe emissions, though the electricity to charge the cars creates emissions.

So far the only electric cars available in the United States are made by small companies, like Tesla Motors, and are prohibitively expensive for most buyers (the Tesla Roadster is priced at over $100,000). Other automakers are in various stages of introducing electric vehicles to the market, and General Motors is preparing to bring out the Chevrolet Volt, a $41,000 model that runs on electricity but is not all-electric because it has a gas engine to extend its driving range.

So for now, at least, the Leaf, which Nissan claims can travel 100 miles on a single battery charge, has the stage pretty much to itself. So Nissan is dedicating extensive resources to the introduction and is taking consumer outreach to new lengths.

The company has studied potential buyers in focus groups, on Internet dialogues and at Leaf "tour stops" at shopping malls across the country. Nissan has even hired a firm to make "home visits" to prospective buyers to make sure their garages are properly equipped for charging the vehicle and to answer other questions.

"These people are the visionaries who see the opportunity and want to be a part of it," Trisha Jung, chief marketing manager for the Leaf, said of the customers who had reserved a Leaf. "They will be demonstrating every day that this is a practical technology."

Mr. McNaughton, the Nashville lawyer, said he was unaware that he had even applied for a free 240-volt charging station for his home. But by filling out a questionnaire, he was selected to be one of 5,700 new Leaf owners to get the charging unit. In exchange, he agreed to let the EV Project — a $230 million national program financed by various government agencies, utilities and corporations — monitor his battery-charging habits.

A 240-volt home charging unit can give the vehicle a full charge in about eight hours, Nissan says.

Ken Muir, an engineer in San Jose, Calif., had a similar surprise when he first saw the Leaf at a mall last year. After mentioning his interest to a Nissan employee, he was contacted by the head of Nissan's West Coast communications team, who arranged for Mr. Muir to get a personal test drive.

After putting down his $99 deposit, Mr. Muir met for an hour in his home with a technician from Nissan's supplier of charging stations. "It's been really amazing to get this amount of personal attention from a huge car company like Nissan," he said.

He is also a bit giddy about the level of financial support he will get — the $7,500 federal tax credit as well as a $5,000 credit from the state of California, and another $2,000 federal credit toward the purchase of a charging unit.

"I've wanted an electric car for 10 years, but I never expected it to make this much economic

sense to get one," Mr. Muir said.

The car itself will keep Nissan connected to its customers long after they drive it off the lot. A communication module installed in the Leaf's lithium-ion battery will send data to Nissan that monitors the condition of the battery and how it is being used. "It's not a 'Big Brother' thing," said Mark Perry, head of North American product planning for Nissan. If Nissan sees that a battery cell "has behaved outside the norm, we want to call you or e-mail you and say, 'Come on in and let's check it out.' "

The first Leafs go on sale in December in five states — California, Oregon, Washington, Arizona and Tennessee, all of which are places where the EV Project is building charging stations.

An earlier version of this article incorrectly referred to the voltage of home charging units. They are 240 volts, not 220.

Maryland Daily Record **http://mddailyrecord.com**

New flooring could aid shore poultry industry

by Barbara Pash

Published: October 6th, 2010

University of Maryland, Eastern Shore officials are crowing about a recent experiment that drastically reduced the ammonia level in chicken houses. But the $1.7 million experiment is about more than reducing the stench of toxic fumes. It's about saving the Delmarva poultry industry.

"If we on Delmarva don't solve this problem, we won't have an industry," Jeannine Harter-Dennis, a UMES poultry scientist, said of chicken litter.

"We won't be able to meet federal government standards, and the poultry industry will go elsewhere," Harter-Dennis said, referring to states like Arkansas, the No. 1 poultry producer in the country, where labor costs are cheaper.

Both the Environmental Protection Agency and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration have regulations about the ammonia level inside poultry houses, for the safety of the workers and the birds.

The EPA is in the process of devising new regulations that will limit the amount of ammonia gas that can be released into the environment by animal production units. Not only is ammonia detrimental to air quality, but it leaks into the ground, affecting the water supply and, ultimately, the tributaries to the Chesapeake Bay.

Before the new EPA regulations come out, possibly in a year, the university, the chicken farmers and the poultry processing companies are looking for ways to address the problem, according to Harter-Dennis.

The ammonia problem in chicken house is a national, even international, issue. But for Delmarva, the tri-state area between the bay and the ocean, it's a matter of survival.

In 2009, the Delmarva industry produced 568 million broilers valued at $2 billion wholesale, with Maryland counting for about half of that.

In Maryland's Delmarva region, the four major production companies employ 15,000 people, plus another 1,700 chicken farmers. Poultry production accounts for two-thirds of total farm sales.

Funding for the UMES experiment came from the Maryland **Department of Business and Economic Development**, $500,000; U.S. Department of Agriculture, $500,000; UMES, $500,000; and **Maryland Industrial Partnerships**, a state agency that is part of the **University System of Maryland**, $200,000. **AviHome** LLC, a Salisbury company whose new flooring system for chicken houses was tested, also contributed financially to be part of the Poultry House Partnership.

It was the first test of the AviHome flooring system, which is based on a double layer of polymer, a form of plastic, allowing air to flow in between. UMES helped to refine the system.

Over eight months, two tests were conducted: first on a small 500-bird chicken house and then on a full-size house of 15,000 to 20,000 birds. The results amazed even UMES officials.

With the AviHome flooring system, the ammonia level dropped at least 80 percent, and that produced healthier, faster-growing birds, said Ronald Forsythe, vice president of technology and commercialization of UMES.

"On one of the hottest days this summer, we smelled no ammonia," Forsythe said. "Normally, you can't come within several feet of a building without being knocked out by the smell, and we were inside the building."

Since the experiment wrapped up this year, UMES and AviHome have been looking for partners to produce and distribute the flooring system. They've gotten inquiries from as far away as Italy and Brazil.

But UMES is not putting all its eggs in the AviHome basket. Other companies are looking into ammonia reduction and, in fact, UMES is conducting an experiment with another company on the same issue.

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