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Monday, September 25, 2017

Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and 66 Tribal Nations

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1 — The fault that produced North Texas' largest quake could produce an even bigger one, study says, Dallas Morning News, 9/25/17
https://www.dallasnews.com/news/science-medicine/2017/09/25/fault-produced-north-texas-largest-quake-produce-even-bigger-one-study-says
The town that experienced a 4-magnitude earthquake in May 2015 — the strongest quake ever recorded in North Texas — sits on a fault with the potential to produce an event 10 times larger, suggests a new study led by scientists at Southern Methodist University. The report also concluded there was "substantial evidence" that the quake, near the Johnson County town of Venus, was triggered by the underground disposal of wastewater from oil and gas operations.

2 — Navajo Nation Artists Respond to the Threat of Uranium Radiation, Hyperallergic, 9/22/17
https://hyperallergic.com/401017/navajo-nation-artists-respond-to-the-threat-of-uranium-radiation/
Nuclear contamination from abandoned uranium mines is rampant across the Navajo Nation, and a community of artists is raising awareness through a street art project and gallery exhibition.

4 — Barrier put in mine that sent toxic water into 3 states, Amarillo Globe News, 9/22/17
http://amarillo.com/national-news/2017-09-22/barrier-put-mine-sent-toxic-water-3-states
he U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is installing a barrier and valve inside an inactive Colorado mine to prevent another surge of wastewater like a 2015 blowout that contaminated rivers in three states. The 12-inch valve will regulate wastewater pouring from the Gold King Mine in the San Juan Mountains of southwestern Colorado, where the EPA inadvertently triggered a wastewater spill while excavating at the mine entrance in August 2015.

5 — Arkansas Defies Monsanto, Moves To Ban Rogue Weedkiller, KSTX, 9/22/17
http://tpr.org/post/arkansas-defies-monsanto-moves-ban-rogue-weedkiller#stream/0
Arkansas is on the verge of banning the use, during the growing season, of a Monsanto-backed weedkiller that has been blamed for damaging millions of acres of crops in neighboring farms this year. The weedkiller is called dicamba. It can be sprayed on soybeans and cotton that have been genetically modified to tolerate it. But not all farmers plant those new seeds. And across the Midwest, farmers that don't use the herbicide are blaming their dicamba-spraying neighbors for widespread damage to their crops — and increasingly, to wild vegetation.

6 — EPA Clarifies FEMA Statement On Texas Toxic Sites, CBS DFW, 9/25/17
http://dfw.cbslocal.com/2017/09/24/epa-fema-texas-toxic-sites/
The Environmental Protection Agency said Sunday it has recovered 517 containers filled with unidentified, potentially hazardous material found floating in or washed up along Texas waterways after the devastating floods from Hurricane Harvey receded. The agency's statement sought to clarify an earlier media release saying the containers were recovered from highly contaminated toxic waste sites.

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7 Colorado landfills are illegally burying low-level radioactive waste from oil and gas industry, Denver Post learns, Denver Post, 9/22/17
http://www.denverpost.com/2017/09/22/colorado-landfills-illegally-burying-radioactive-waste-oil-gas/
Colorado landfills have been illegally burying low-level radioactive waste from the oil and gas industry that they are not approved to handle, state health officials revealed this week. State health regulators, confirming at a meeting with local governments the disposal of unknown amounts at ordinary landfills, are trying to prohibit the practice and buttress their oversight. Colorado's booming oil and gas industry produces millions of tons of waste, some of it radioactive, and both waste producers and landfill operators are obligated to handle it properly.

8 Questions Surround Chromium At LANL, $9M Project Brings More Water To Navajo Communities, KUNM, 9/25/17
http://kunm.org/post/questions-surround-chromium-lanl-9m-project-brings-more-water-navajo-communities
A top official with the U.S. Energy Department says the agency is still uncertain about the extent of contamination from a massive plume of chromium that resulted from decades of poor waste management at Los Alamos National Laboratory. Doug Hintze with the Energy Department's environmental management field office in Los Alamos told state lawmakers during a recent hearing that cancer-causing chromium and other chemicals have continued to seep from the soil in Mortandad Canyon into the groundwater.

9 Carp, clams and crested floating-hearts: Louisiana on alert for invasive species, Times Picayune, 9/23/17
http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2017/09/hurricane_harvey_invasive_species.html#incart_river_index
Hurricane Harvey flushed thousands of people from their homes in southeast Texas. It might also have flushed common carp, Asian clams and a flower called the crested floating-heart across the Texas boarder into Louisiana. That's the premise behind a new web-based application developed by the U.S. Geological Survey to track invasive species. It assumes that Harvey's floodwaters created news pathways by which aquatic species could move from one body of water to another.

10 OPINION: Ignoring science won't end environmental problems, Times Picayune, 9/24/17
http://www.nola.com/opinions/index.ssf/2017/09/climate_science.html#incart_river_index
This just in: WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Urged on by cheering crowds in Make America Great Again caps and GOP congressmen from oil producing states, President Trump last night stood on the steps of the Environmental Protection Agency Building and proclaimed "Carbon today! Carbon tomorrow! Carbon forever!" He then put a torch to a 100-foot tall stack of climate research reports, science textbooks, first editions of "On the Origin of Species" -- and an effigy of Al Gore.

11 Weird creatures washing ashore, shrimping with diversions: This week's coastal news, Times Picayune, 9/24/17
http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2017/09/weird_creatures_washing_ashore.html#incart_river_index
Hurricanes Harvey and Irma pushed some unusual stuff ashore. A strange-looking eel was found on a Texas City, Texas, beach, and a historic-looking canoe was discovered in Cocoa, Fla. In Grand Isle, officials responded to what they first thought was another whale washing ashore. It was later identified as Risso's dolphin.

12 CDC: Mosquitoes carrying Zika, other deadly viruses could breed in 75 percent of the US, AJC, 9/22/17
http://www.ajc.com/news/cdc-mosquitoes-carrying-zika-other-deadly-viruses-could-breed-percent-the/2pqa4NuNBaHfhr5TL2p4rI/
According to a CDC study, up to 75 percent of the contiguous United States may provide suitable conditions for several species of disease-spreading mosquitoes. The recent study, published in the Public Journal of Entomology, found 71 percent of counties in the 48 contiguous states were suitable for the aegypti species and 75 percent could support albopictus species.

13 Exxon Mobil launches new methane emissions reduction program, Houston Chron, 9/25/17
http://www.chron.com/business/energy/article/Exxon-Mobil-launches-new-methane-emissions-12226095.php
Exxon Mobil is launching a new program focused on reducing methane emissions and leaks from its U.S. oil and gas production and pipelines. The project is focusing on installing environmentally efficient equipment and more leak-detection sensors throughout its onshore shale oil and gas operations in the U.S.

14 Pruitt plans to release schedule, Greenwire, 9/22/17
https://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2017/09/22/stories/1060061477
U.S. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt is planning to release his public calendar, long sought by his critics on Capitol Hill and in the environmental movement. Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.), ranking member on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, offered faint praise for the move by Pruitt. Earlier this year, the Democratic senator had called on the EPA chief to release his schedule on a monthly basis (E&E News PM, March 17).

15 State advances herbicide ban, setting up Monsanto fight, Greenwire, 9/22/17
https://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2017/09/22/stories/1060061425
Arkansas officials have advanced a plan to ban farmers from using the controversial herbicide dicamba next summer, likely setting up a legal battle between the state and Monsanto Co., the maker of the chemical. The Arkansas State Plant Board yesterday brought the state one step closer to solidifying a rule that would ban the herbicide between April 16 and Oct. 31 next year.

16 After Harvey, experts worry about climate, dam safety, Greenwire, 9/22/17
https://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2017/09/22/stories/1060061453
As the oceans warm and extreme weather events like Hurricane Harvey become more common on the Gulf Coast, climatologists are warning that Texas' dams might not be up to the test. Dams are generally designed with the most extreme scenario in mind, but weather experts say Harvey matched or exceeded the maximum amounts of rainfall that the state's dams are designed to hold off.

17 Federal decision on solar panel imports could cost Texas jobs, slow down installations
https://www.dallasnews.com/business/energy/2017/09/22/washingtons-solar-decision-cost-texas-jobs-help-manufacturing-elsewhere
The plummeting cost of solar electricity could soon be on its way up.
The U.S. International Trade Commission decided 4-0 Friday that imported solar cells and panels are threatening the domestic manufacturing industry, potentially setting the stage for President Donald Trump to set tariffs, a price floor or take some other action early next year.

18 State seeks more data before granting permit to hog farm in river's watershed, Ark. Democrat Gazette, 9/23/17
http://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2017/sep/23/hog-farm-permit-decision-put-off-more-d-1/
The Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality sent a letter this week to the owners of C&H Hog Farms asking for more documentation of their facility and plans as the department continues to evaluate the facility's permit application. The documents are already in the public record, Buffalo River Watershed Alliance board member Brian Thompson told the Arkansas Pollution Control and Ecology Commission on Friday. Thompson called the request, which allows C&H 90 days to respond, a delay tactic and an "affront to public trust."

19 EPA clarifies earlier FEMA statement on Texas toxic sites, Star-telegram, 9/24/17
http://www.star-telegram.com/news/state/texas/article175186081.html
The Environmental Protection Agency said Sunday it has recovered 517 containers filled with unidentified, potentially hazardous material found floating in or washed up along Texas waterways after the devastating floods from Hurricane Harvey receded. The agency's statement sought to clarify an earlier media release saying the containers were recovered from highly contaminated toxic waste sites.

20 Lead & other metals found in the water in Enterprise, Louisiana, KNOE, 9/22/17
http://www.knoe.com/content/news/Lead-other-metals-found-in-the-water-in-Enterprise-LA-446651243.html
According to tests conducted by Virginia Tech, water in several homes in Enterprise, Louisiana tested positive for high levels of lead and other metals. The results come after a group took samples from 21 locations, 18 homes in the area last week.

21 Why has the 2017 hurricane season been so bad?, Times Picayune, 9/23/17
http://www.nola.com/hurricane/index.ssf/2017/09/why_has_the_2017_hurricane_sea.html
The 2017 hurricane season has been a full-on assault from Mother Nature. We are under siege, and our attackers have benign names like Harvey and Irma and Maria. But they are callous, powerful, indiscriminate, terrifying, destructive, merciless and relentless. Is Earth trying to eject us from the planet? Again and again and again the harshest of winds and hardest of rains has pounded on the most-defenseless territories we have. The Caribbean islands, hanging out in open sea. The Florida peninsula, jutting out into danger. The Texas coastline, low-lying and concrete-laden. Nearly a full month of back-to-back-to-back disasters.

22 Keep methane rule intact, Santa Fe New Mexican, 9/23/17
http://www.santafenewmexican.com/opinion/my_view/keep-methane-rule-intact/article_457b9b5c-a9b9-531a-8805-32647b387f54.html
Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt: As a resident of New Mexico, I am extending to you a cheerful and hearty welcome to come and live and work in the middle of the Permian Basin or in the town of Farmington. Since you do not think there is a problem with leaking methane and want to delay the implementation of the Leak Detection and Repair part of the Methane Rule, you should come here and experience it, firsthand. Breathe deeply!

23 Farmers Claim Drift Problems Persist After Two States Banned Herbicide Dicamba, Foodtank, 9/24/17
https://foodtank.com/news/2017/09/herbicide-dicamba/
Researchers from the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture found in August that every formulation of the herbicide dicamba they tested—including Monsanto's XtendiMax, BASF's Engenia, and DuPont's FeXapan—displayed volatility, or a tendency to blow away from the location it was originally sprayed. Some formulations remained volatile for up to 36 hours, even when proper application instructions were followed carefully.

24 After Harvey, 100+ debris dump sites pop up around town, ABC, 9/22/17
http://abc13.com/residents-frustrated-by-harvey-debris-management-sites/2444570/
Friends Howard Otis and Victor Hebert are taking a lot of pictures these days, but none of the images are pretty. Instead, they are pictures of debris truck after debris truck dropping off at the landfill across the street from their homes. "I do remember it being a landfill," said Otis, who has lived on and off in the neighborhood near Tanner Road for years. "But I never remember it being like this."

25 Parts of Port Arthur under boil water notice due to water main break and low pressure, KFDM, 9/22/17
http://kfdm.com/news/local/parts-of-port-arthur-under-boil-water-notice-due-to-water-main-break-and-low-pressure
The City of Port Arthur from Highway 73 to 4th Street between Highway 82 and Taft Ave is under an immediate boil water notice due to a water main break and subsequent loss of pressure, according to a city spokeswoman. These areas include the west side of Port Arthur, Sabine Pass, Pleasure Island, and eastward to Highway 366. The water main break happened near Savannah and 19th Street, but spokeswoman LaRisa Carpenter says it has since been fixed.

26 Forum to discuss proposed chemical plant in Killeen, KDH News, 9/23/17
http://kdhnews.com/news/local/forum-to-discuss-proposed-chemical-plant-in-killeen/article_d560e77e-a0d4-11e7-8171-87af714eab7f.html
The groundbreaking was private for MGC Pure Chemicals America's proposed plant at the Killeen Business Park. The public wasn't invited to the Aug. 30 event. Nor was media allowed. The Killeen Daily Herald reporter was told the media could ask questions at 11:15 a.m., after the groundbreaking, but nearly all participants were gone before 10:50 a.m. that day.

27 NMSU faculty, students use weather balloons to test ozone levels, NM State, 9/22/17
http://newscenter.nmsu.edu/Articles/view/12710/nmsu-faculty-students-use-weather-balloons-to-test-ozone-levels
Students at New Mexico State University are getting hands-on experience launching weather balloons to test ozone levels in the area. NMSU faculty and students are launching the weather balloons as part of a project with the El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. (Photo by Dave DuBois) Man kneeling, woman standing holding weather balloon.

SCIENCE AND MEDICINE 3 HRS AGO

The fault that produced North Texas' largest quake could produce an even bigger one, study says

Anna Kuchment, Staff writer

The town that experienced a 4-magnitude earthquake in May 2015 — the strongest quake ever recorded in North Texas — sits on a fault with the potential to produce an event 10 times larger, suggests a new study led by scientists at Southern Methodist University.

The report also concluded there was "substantial evidence" that the quake, near the Johnson County town of Venus, was triggered by the underground disposal of wastewater from oil and gas operations.

An aerial shot of a wastewater disposal site in Venus, Texas, in June 2016. (Jae S. Lee/Staff Photographer)

The study was the latest to investigate North Texas' earthquake surge, which began in 2008 and has generated more than 200 tremors. The most recent widely felt event was a 3.1-magnitude quake that struck near the border of Irving and Dallas on Aug. 25.

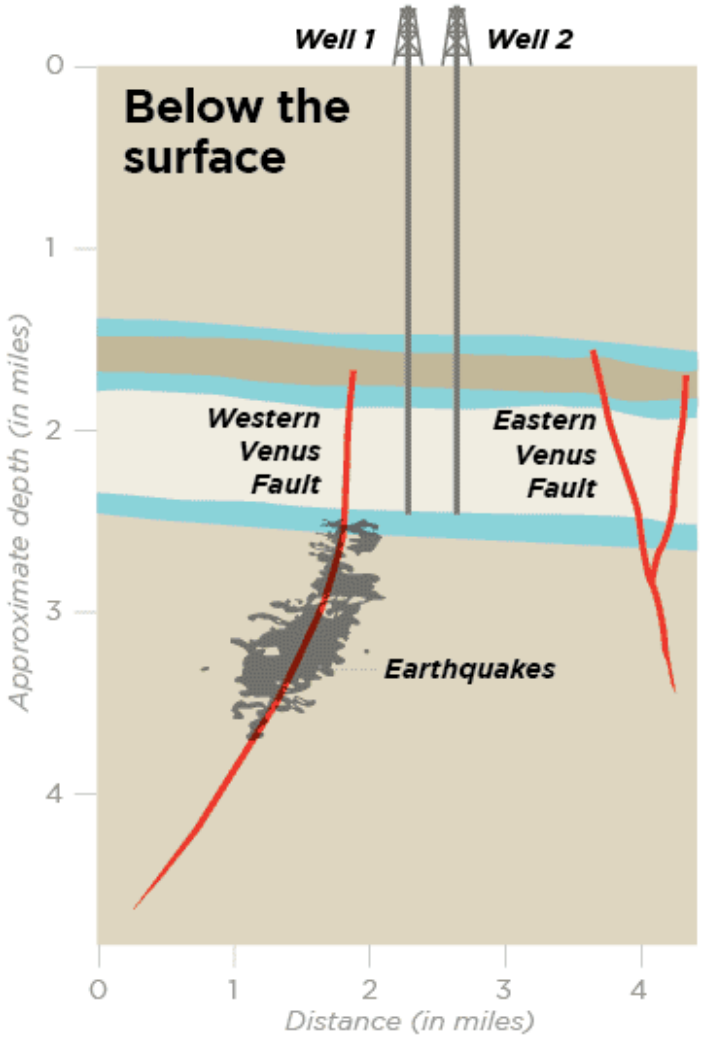
3.1-magnitude earthquake in northwest Dallas surprises residents, scientists

The U.S. Geological Survey, backed by peer-reviewed studies, has categorized the post-2008 earthquakes as human-induced. But the Railroad Commission of Texas, an agency that both regulates and promotes the oil and gas industry, has not accepted the USGS findings.

In response to the new study, published Sept. 4 in the journal *Solid Earth*, the Railroad Commission said through a spokesperson only that its seismologist, Aaron Velasco, had not had the chance to thoroughly review the paper.

Fault lines

Scientists at SMU have identified two faults near Venus. One produced a 4-magnitude earthquake in May 2015 and holds the potential to produce stronger events. The scientists linked the quakes to wastewater wells in the area. Since 2015, Well 1 has stopped injecting and Well 2 was plugged to a shallower depth.



SOURCE: American Geophysical Union Michael Hogue/Staff Artist

SOURCE: American Geophysical Union Michael Hogue/Staff Artist

The team of seismologists identified two previously unpublished faults near Venus and Mansfield, about 30 miles southwest of Dallas. The researchers found that the fault responsible for the 2015 quake is at least 4 miles long and holds the potential to produce a 5-magnitude or greater earthquake if the fault ruptured along its full length.

“This is not meant to be taken as, ‘a magnitude 5 will happen on this fault,'” said SMU’s Heather DeShon, a who led the new study. Until now, the fault has ruptured only in smaller sections, and it may never produce a bigger event, she said.

Heather DeShon in 2015 (Thao Nguyen/Special Contributor)

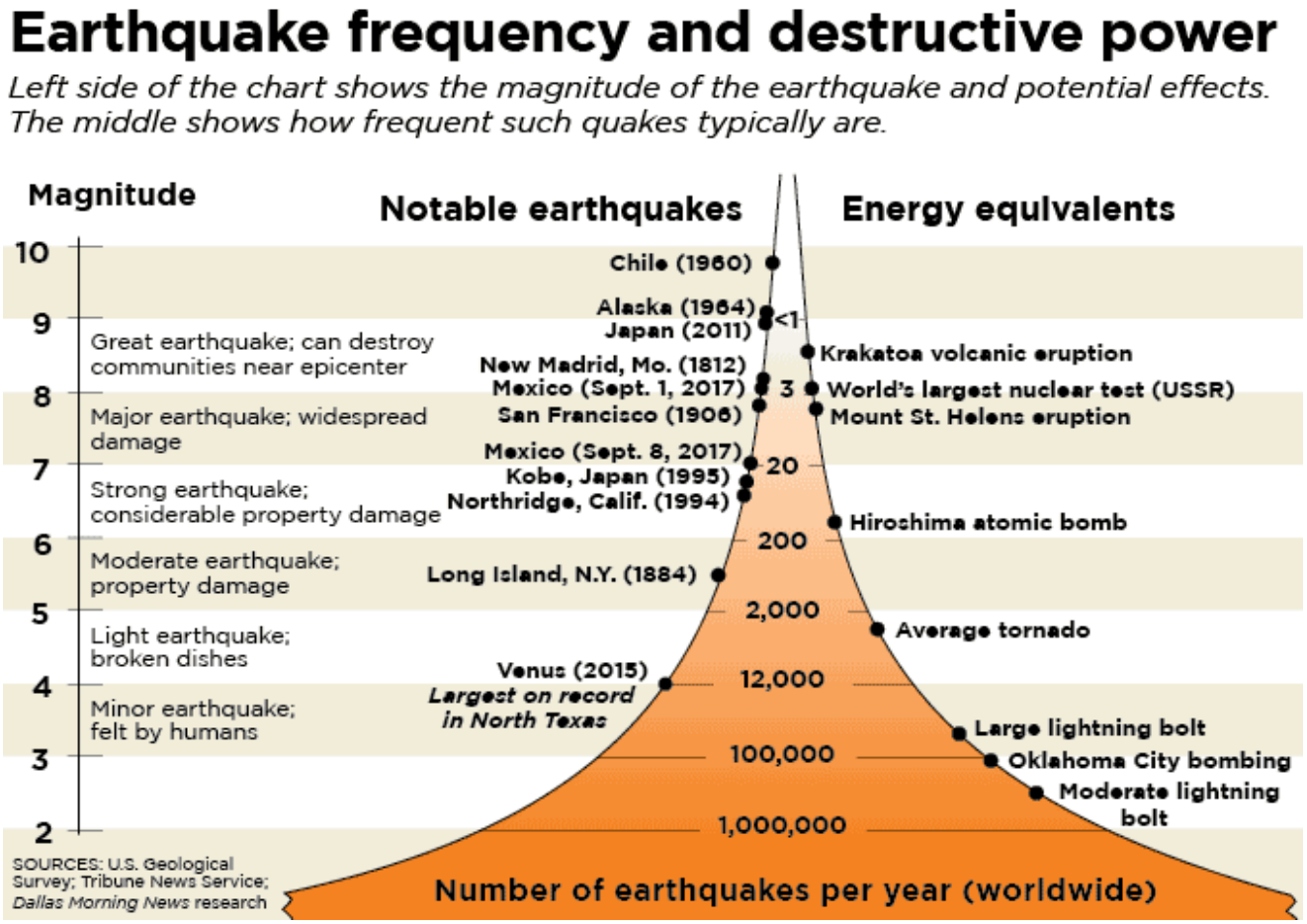
Quakes of that size are considered moderate and don’t typically cause serious property damage. But a 5-magnitude earthquake that struck Cushing, Okla. in November caused several brick buildings, which are especially vulnerable to earthquake damage, to be condemned. At least one of those buildings later collapsed, and others were torn down, said Jacob Walter, Oklahoma’s state seismologist who contributed to the paper while he was at the University of Texas at Austin's Institute for Geophysics.

Because earthquakes in North Texas and Oklahoma are shallower than typical natural quakes, they can be felt more strongly near the epicenter.

DeShon, Walter and their colleagues also found that the 4-magnitude event marked the culmination of a series of increasingly large earthquakes along the same fault that began a decade ago, shortly after companies began disposing wastewater in northeast Johnson County. Until May 2015, earthquake magnitudes increased in step with injection volumes.

To DeShon, that means turning off individual wells is not likely to affect earthquake sizes or rates.

“From a mitigation standpoint, you need to start thinking in terms of the cumulative history of injection in regions,” she said.



Johnson County Emergency Management Director Jamie Moore said that the county had factored earthquakes into its plans but that tornadoes and floods took priority because of limited resources. “We focus on what are the most likely scenarios, not necessarily the most damaging ones,” he said. He is concerned about the possibility of an earthquake shifting gas pipelines and causing a leak. But, because Johnson County is home to a dense network of wells and pipelines, first responders are prepared for those situations, he said.

Moore suggested that the earthquakes are more of a political issue than one of emergency management. “It’s a completely separate issue whether we as a society want to live with minor earthquakes that are very odd and certainly very noticeable,” he said.

The 4-magnitude earthquake that shook Venus on May 7, 2015, generated a flood of phone calls to Moore’s office but only one report of relatively minor damage: a block holding up a mobile home cracked.

A 5-magnitude earthquake would be 10 times bigger than a magnitude 4 and would release 30 times more energy.

The new study suggests that pressure from wastewater injections in Johnson County triggered the May 2015 4-magnitude earthquake. Energy companies rely on wastewater wells to dispose of fluid left over from hydraulic fracturing and other oil and gas production techniques. Johnson County, which sits atop the gas-rich Barnett Shale, is one of the densest regions in the U.S. for wastewater disposal wells, with more than five for every 2 square miles. Disposal and gas production wells dot the landscape, sometimes hidden behind trees but often rising amid new housing developments and alongside roads.

To extract gas, companies force millions of gallons of water, sand and chemicals down a well to fracture the shale. As the gas travels from the rock back up the well, fracking fluid and natural groundwater travel up with it. Companies then separate the oil and gas from the wastewater, then truck the wastewater to a disposal well that injects the fluid deep underground, where it is less likely to contaminate soil and drinking water.

Studies going back to the 1960s have shown that pressure from wastewater injections can cause faults to slip and produce earthquakes. More recently, scientists have learned that only a small percentage of faults — those oriented in just the right direction relative to natural stresses in the earth — are likely to slip in such cases.

Scientists offer possible explanation for how oil and gas activity may have triggered Dallas earthquakes

That rare set of circumstances converged in Venus on May 7, 2015. In response, the Railroad Commission sent inspectors to the area to check wells and pipelines for damage and asked operators of the five wells closest to the epicenter to temporarily shut down and perform pressure tests. The commission then issued a statement saying there was "no conclusive evidence" tying the wells to the earthquake.

SMU scientists analyzed data from those tests and found that pressures around the wells were elevated significantly enough to trigger an earthquake. Despite publicly playing down links between wastewater injection and the earthquake, the Railroad Commission privately asked one of the well operators, Metro Saltwater Disposal, to plug back its well to a shallower depth. Another operator, EOG Resources, stopped injecting into one of its wells after May 2015, according to public data available on the Railroad Commission website. It has since plugged that well and sold its natural gas assets in Johnson County, according to a company spokesperson.

In November, Railroad Commissioner Ryan Sitton came close to publicly accepting the wastewater disposal-earthquake link. He said the connection was especially plausible in Johnson County. "I have seen credible data and science from operators that lead me to believe that [Johnson County] has elevated risks of seismicity related to disposal activities, and therefore warrants additional investigation," he said in a prepared statement.

That investigation, he suggested, would come from UT-Austin's Bureau of Economic Geology, which operates TexNet, Texas's new state-funded seismic network, and hosts the industry-sponsored Center for Integrated Seismicity Research, or CISR.

Peter Hennings, principal investigator of CISR, called the new study "a valuable contribution for understanding earthquakes in Johnson County" and said the link between the earthquake and the wells was "reasonable" but incomplete pending more definitive studies. His group is also investigating faults in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and their potential to produce earthquakes and will begin releasing those findings in December.

He added that the reduction in wastewater volumes in Johnson County since 2012 suggests that a stronger earthquake would be less likely now but cannot be ruled out. Since Oklahoma began reducing its wastewater injections, it has seen several larger quakes, even as its overall earthquake rate has decreased.

For that reason, wrote DeShon and her colleagues, the May 7, 2015 earthquake “may be neither the final nor the largest earthquake in this sequence."

Read more: Why Texas won't admit fracking wastewater is causing earthquakes

Earthquakes: North Texas responds to a surge of tremors

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HYPERALLERGIC

ARTICLES

Navajo Nation Artists Respond to the Threat of Uranium Radiation

Nuclear contamination from abandoned uranium mines is rampant across the Navajo Nation, and a community of artists is raising awareness through a street art project and gallery exhibition.

Emily Pier | 4 days ago

"Radioactive Pollution Kills. It's Time To Clean Up The Mines." (2016) by Icy & Sot for *The Painted Desert* project in Gray Mountain, A.Z. (all photos by Emily Pier for Hyperallergic unless otherwise noted)

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. — A large-scale human rights violation is occurring in the United States, and there is a dearth of news coverage on the issue. Nuclear contamination from abandoned uranium mines is rampant across the Navajo Nation's 27,000 square miles of land, throughout Utah, New Mexico and Arizona. This situation has left thousands of people without access to safe drinking water, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In response, a community of artists is raising awareness about the problem through a street art project and a gallery exhibition.

The Southwest has a legacy of uranium mining that has contaminated water, destroyed land, killed people and animals, and forced the government to pay billions in reparations. Abandoned mines and nuclear waste litter the area's Indian

reservation, yet only a fraction of the contaminated sites have proper warning signs. Fortunately, artists are using murals and billboards to alert the public to these hazards.

Grafica Mazatl and Stinkfish (left hand side of the structure); Tom Tomahawk Greyeyes and Nadine Narindrankura (right hand side); Greyeyes' mural serves as a fact sheet of coal mining in Navajo Nation and the associated environmental and health impacts. Both collaborations are for *The Painted Desert* project in Shonto, A.Z.

The Painted Desert Project is a street art collaboration that warns people of radioactive pollution in the area of the Navajo Nation, and is curated by Dr. Chip "Jetsonorama" Thomas. The artist (who has adopted the nickname "Jetsonorama") is also a medical doctor who lives on the Indian reservation and treats people who have developed cancer and other health complications as a result of radioactive exposure. Jetsonorama's art serves as a means of educating people about environmental injustices that deeply affect the Navajo Nation. He hopes that his artwork will encourage people to petition Congress and the federal government to clean up old mines and contaminated land and water.

As part of *The Painted Desert Project*, inside of a hut he had wheat-pasted, Jetsonorama hung a sign stating:

> Welcome to #ThePaintedDesertProject. The photo … speaks to the land around this old pump house. Much of the land is contaminated with uranium. There's >500 uncapped uranium mines on the rez. They affect this land, the water, animals + people. (Don't linger in this room + don't kick up dust.)

Wheat-pasted pump house on a radioactive wasteland by Jetsonorama for The Painted Desert Project in Cameron, A.Z.

An installation piece by Icy & Sot called "The Killing Wind" (2016) rests on the floor of the pump house. The plastic fan, painted to resemble the warning symbol for nuclear radiation, serves as a reminder of the wind's ability to spread nuclear particles hundreds of miles . Radioactive dust can be especially problematic when contaminants blow into nearby

streams or other water sources. Although Jetsonorama has gained international exposure through his collaborations with world renowned artists, such as Icy and Sot, this publicity has yet to translate into the passing of meaningful legislation or tangible progress with respect to cleaning up the mines.

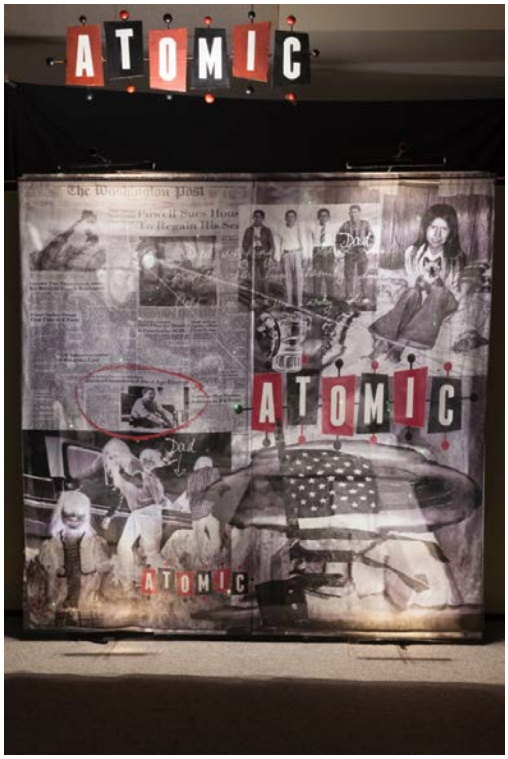
"The Killing Wind" (2016) by Icy & Sot for The Painted Desert Project in Cameron, A.Z.

To further his efforts to catalyze change, Jetsonorama brought his work from the open desert to an indoor gallery with his participation in *Hope + Trauma in a Poisoned Land*, an art exhibition running through October 28, 2017 at the Coconino Center for the Arts in Flagstaff, Arizona. The show raises awareness about uranium mining and its aftermath and promotes healing through artistic expression. It features the work of 20 local artists, including Jetsonorama, who in the previous year had attended a four-day educational seminar about uranium and contamination on Native American soil, in which Navajo community members, scientists, mental health professionals, and health care experts had educated the participants on the impacts of uranium mining. Jetsonorama used the information he had learned from the seminar in his work pertaining to abandoned uranium mines in the Navajo Nation.

Jetsonorama's wall mural in Phoenix, A.Z. promoting Hope + Trauma in A Poisoned Land: The Impact of Uranium Mining on Navajo Lands at Coconino Center for the Arts in Flagstaff, A.Z.

Jetsonorama's major installation piece entitled, "Atomic (r)Age" (2017) features a newspaper article about hidden casualties of the Atomic Age printed on translucent fabric. The man pictured in the 1967 article from *The Washington Post* featured in "Atomic r(Age)" is the father of Jetsonorama's colleague who died from cancer related to uranium mining. As described on Jetsonorama's website: "the see-through material … references the ephemeral, fragile and transient nature of our life experience at a time when the new Secretary of Energy seeks to 'make nuclear cool again' in a new atomic age."

The massive size of this piece — eight feet by eight feet — reflects the monumental nature of the issue. The piece also shares the story of one victim of uranium mining and his family, thereby simultaneously personalizing the enormous problem.



Jetsonorama's installation ""Atomic r(Age)" (2017) (photo courtesy Jetsonorama)

Uranium, an element that naturally exists beneath the earth's surface, is used for nuclear energy. It supplies 11% of the world's electricity and is used for weapons and atomic bombs. During the Cold War, the development of nuclear weaponry increased demand for radioactive ores in the United States. From 1944 through 1986, 30 million tons of uranium was excavated from the Navajo Nation by independent energy companies operating under U.S. government contracts to make nuclear weapons and fuel. By 1970, the Atomic Energy Commission had ample reserves and stopped buying uranium. Domestic uranium mining ceased in the mid 1980's due to plentiful reserves, foreign competition, nuclear fears, and federal regulations. Energy companies abandoned the mines without cleaning them up. At the time, Navajo miners and residents were not informed of the health or environmental ramifications of uranium mining.

Helen Padilla's poem for *Hope + Trauma in A Poisoned Land* (photo courtesy Helen Padilla)

Many Native Americans died from lung cancer as a result of working in unventilated mines. Kidney failure and various types of cancer also killed many who merely lived nearby. *Hope + Trauma* shares the stories of these people who live with the consequences of uranium mining and whose land, water, animals, and surroundings have been polluted. Performance, installations,

photographs, paintings, and poems reveal the impact that 42 years of uranium exploitation has had on the community.

Abandoned mines continue to emit dangerous levels of radiation. In 2014, the federal government allocated $1 billion to clean up 50 of the 521 abandoned uranium mines on the Navajo Nation. Some progress has been made, but Trump's EPA budget cuts are interfering. Furthermore, contamination can worsen if new mining is allowed. Trump has threatened to reverse Obama's 20-year moratorium on new uranium mining near the Grand Canyon and to reconfigure the national monuments boundaries set by the former president, and thus remove current restrictions on land use. These destructive environmental policies would be a death sentence to many.

"Buffalo Bear" by Alexis Diaz for The Painted Desert Project in Bitter Springs, A.Z.

The perilous state of conservation underscores the importance of the efforts of the Navajo Nation's art community to raise awareness. It is the federal government's responsibility to see that the contamination is fully remediated, but much work remains to be done. Jetsonorama has done a wonderful job of working with other artists to raise awareness and encourage people to contact government officials to address the environmental injustices in the Navajo Nation. Until the government takes further action to protect the public from dangerous radioactive exposure, the best hope of reform comes from grassroots efforts such as the ones being pursued by Navajo Nation artists.

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(/)

Posted September 22, 2017 11:58 pm

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS (/associated-press-1)

Barrier put in mine that sent toxic water into 3 states

DENVER — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is installing a barrier and valve inside an inactive Colorado mine to prevent another surge of wastewater like a 2015 blowout that contaminated rivers in three states.

The 12-inch valve will regulate wastewater pouring from the Gold King Mine in the San Juan Mountains of southwestern Colorado, where the EPA inadvertently triggered a wastewater spill while excavating at the mine entrance in August 2015.

That spill released 3 million gallons of wastewater containing aluminum, iron and other heavy metals and instantly became a major embarrassment for the EPA.

Rivers in Colorado, New Mexico and Utah were tainted. Irrigators, water utilities and rafting companies temporarily stopped using the Animas and San Juan rivers. The EPA says water quality quickly returned to pre-spill levels.

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The valve will be mounted in a steel-and concrete barrier about 70 feet inside the mine. The barrier will have water-tight access doors so workers and equipment can get deeper into the mine for cleanup and investigation.

The EPA is also drilling a 170-foot horizontal well into another part of the Gold King to drain any water building up there. That water would be routed through a temporary treatment plant below the mine where wastewater draining from the main entrance is cleaned up.

The EPA said it can control the flow of wastewater from the new drain to avoid another blowout.

The documents did not say say how much the work will cost and the EPA did not immediately respond to emails and a phone call Wednesday seeking comment.

The work is expected to be completed next month.

Peter Butler, a leader of the volunteer Animas River Stakeholders Group, which works to improve water quality in the area, said he agreed with the EPA's decision to install the barrier and drainage well.

"It's probably a good idea," he said. "They are showing an abundance of caution."

Wastewater has flowed from the Gold King for years, and since the 2015 blowout, it has poured out at a rate of about 500 gallons a minute.

Mine waste flows are unpredictable In the San Juan Mountains, where underground water flows through an interconnected warren of mine tunnels and natural faults.

Precautions such as the barrier, valve and horizontal drain will make it safer for investigators to enter the mines and try to figure out the water flows, Butler said.

The Gold King and dozens of other mining-related sites in the region were designated a Superfund district in 2016.

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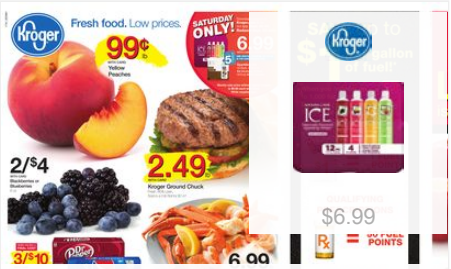

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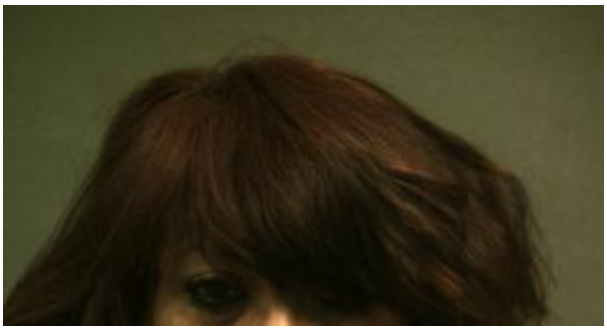

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Arkansas Defies Monsanto, Moves To Ban Rogue Weedkiller

By DAN CHARLES (/PEOPLE/DAN-CHARLES) • SEP 22, 2017

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David Wildy, a prominent Arkansas farmer, in a field of soybeans that were damaged by dicamba. He says that "farmers need this technology. But right is right and wrong is wrong. And when you let a technology, a pesticide or whatever, get on your neighbor, it's not right. We can't do that."

DAN CHARLES/NPR

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Originally published on September 23, 2017 12:33 pm

Arkansas is on the verge of banning the use, during the growing season, of a Monsanto-backed weedkiller that has been blamed for damaging millions of acres of crops in neighboring farms this year.

The weedkiller is called dicamba. It can be sprayed on soybeans and cotton that have been genetically modified to tolerate it. But not all farmers plant those new seeds. And across the Midwest, farmers that don't use the herbicide are blaming their dicamba-spraying neighbors for widespread damage to their crops — and increasingly, to wild vegetation.

The issue has driven a wedge through farming communities in the Midwest, straining friendships and turning neighbors into adversaries.

Monsanto turned to dicamba because many weeds have evolved resistance to the company's earlier weed-killing weapon of choice, glyphosate, also known as Roundup. Increasingly, Roundup no longer gets rid of farmers' most troublesome weeds.

Dicamba is an old herbicide, but it's now being used much more widely, in combination with a new generation of genetically modified, dicamba-tolerant crops. It's also being widely used, for the first time, in the heat of summer, which makes the herbicide more prone to "volatilizing" — turning into a vapor and drifting in unpredictable directions.

This was the first year that farmers were allowed to spray it on soybean and cotton fields. (Some farmers did use dicamba illegally (http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/08/01/487809643/crime-in-the-fields-how-monsanto-and-scofflaw-farmers-hurt-soybeans-in-arkansas) last year, provoking disputes between farmers that in one case, led to murder (http://www.npr.org/2017/06/14/532879755/a-pesticide-a-pigweed-and-a-farmers-murder).) Many farmers embraced the new tool. But it quickly turned controversial: Farmers couldn't seem to keep dicamba confined to their own fields.

The problem was worst in Arkansas, where almost 1,000 farmers filed formal complaints of damage caused by drifting dicamba. But the rogue weedkiller has hit fields across soybean-growing areas from Mississippi to Minnesota.

According to estimates (https://ipm.missouri.edu/IPCM/2017/8/Update-on-Dicamba-related-Injury-Investigations-and-Estimates-of-Injured-Soybean-Acreage/) compiled by weed scientist Kevin Bradley at the University of Missouri, at least 3 million acres of crops have seen some injury. Most are soybeans that aren't resistant to dicamba, but vegetable crops like watermelons, fruit trees and wild vegetation have been injured as well. The dicamba vapors didn't typically kill the plants but left behind curled leaves and sometimes stunted plants.

"There is no precedent for what we've seen this year," says Bob Scott (https://personnel-directory.uaex.edu/People/uaex905809/Robert-Scott), a weed specialist with the University of Arkansas.

The Arkansas State Plant Board now has taken the lead in cracking down on the problem. On Thursday, it voted unanimously to ban the use of dicamba on the state's crops from mid-April until November. This amounts to a ban on the use of dicamba in combination with Monsanto's genetically engineered crops. It's not a final decision: The governor and a group of legislative leaders have to sign off on the Plant Board's regulatory decisions, but they usually do so. That won't happen, however, until after a public hearing set for Nov. 8.

The board also approved a steep increase in fines — up to $25,000 — for farmers who use dicamba and similar herbicides illegally.

Monsanto insists that its version of dicamba, which the company has mixed with an additive that's supposed to make it less volatile, does not drift from the fields where it is sprayed if farmers use it correctly. The company sent a delegation of five people, including Ty Vaughn, a top executive, to this week's meeting of the Plant Board. They passed out binders and thumb drives filled with data from the company's own tests — tests that convinced the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to approve the chemical on crops.

Vaughn told the board that most of the damage from dicamba comes from farmers not understanding or following the rules for using it properly. "There's going to be a learning curve," he said. "It behooves all of us to continue to learn, and work toward solutions. I hope that's the goal of everybody in the conversation."

For Monsanto, a lot of money is at stake — potentially hundreds of millions of dollars. Nationwide, Monsanto sold enough dicamba-tolerant soybeans to cover 20 million acres this year, and the company expects that number to rise.

But Monsanto may have underestimated the backlash against dicamba in Arkansas. The Plant Board was convinced by field experiments carried out this summer by researchers at the University of Arkansas and other universities. Those tests showed that dicamba — even new formulations created by Monsanto and another chemical company, BASF — does vaporize and spread across the landscape.

David Wildy, a prominent farmer in Manila, Ark., who served on a state-appointed task force that recommended the ban on dicamba use on crops, says that "farmers need this technology. But right is right and wrong is wrong. And when you let a technology, a pesticide or whatever, get on your neighbor, it's not right. We can't do that."

After Thursday's vote, Monsanto's Vaughn sounded defiant, accusing the Plant Board of ignoring scientific data. "The most troubling thing is, we did come in good faith to try and provide more information — the binders and the flash drives — and clearly they did not even consider that information before they made their decision," he said. He said that the company was "keeping all options open" in deciding how to respond. Monsanto has previously threatened to go to court if Arkansas went ahead with a dicamba ban.

In recent weeks, others have also started reporting damage from dicamba. These include gardeners, beekeepers and wildlife advocates.

The most impassioned speaker at this week's meeting of the Plant Board, in fact, was Richard Coy, who manages 13,000 honeybee hives in Arkansas, Missouri and Mississippi. Coy reported that in areas where farmers were spraying dicamba on their crops, honey production in his hives fell by 30 to 50 percent, apparently because dicamba stopped wild vegetation from blooming, thus depriving bees of sustenance.

"Yes, it's just weeds and vines," Coy told the board. "But those weeds and vines are there for a reason. This is about the environment. If we don't get a handle on it, our natural environment will not be the same."

Other states, and the EPA, are considering new restrictions on dicamba use. But so far, none have come up with specific proposals.

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DAVID GREENE, HOST:

OK. When you hear scandal of the year, you're probably not thinking agriculture. But millions of acres of crops have been damaged by a rogue weed killer that drifted over from nearby fields. One of the companies that's backing the weed killer is Monsanto. And the state of Arkansas is close to banning the use of this weed killer. NPR's Dan Charles is with us. Hey there, Dan.

DAN CHARLES, BYLINE: Hi, David.

GREENE: OK. So first of all, catch us up on the news. There was an important vote about all this in Arkansas last night.

CHARLES: Right. So a state - the state plant board, which is a committee of private citizens connected to agriculture with authority to regulate pesticides - they voted yesterday to ban the use of this particular herbicide called dicamba during the summer time - basically, from mid-April through November - because they say, we can't control this herbicide. It drifts into neighboring fields.

GREENE: OK. You've got to step back for me now for people who haven't followed this at all and explain what this pesticide is and how all these crops have been getting damaged and how big a deal this is.

CHARLES: Right. This is kind of a case where a new technology gets rolled out before, apparently, people fully understand what it's - how it's going to behave. It's a new version of a - you know, an approach to wiping out weeds that Monsanto pioneered 20 years ago, where you genetically modify crops so they can tolerate, you know, a herbicide, a weed killer. Makes it easier for farmers to spray the fields, kill the weeds. And their crops are safe. They did this first with Roundup, known as glyphosate. Roundup doesn't work as well because a lot of weeds have evolved resistance to it. So there's a new one. It's called dicamba. It's an old herbicide. But dicamba has this problem people knew about. It tends to drift, you know, from the place you sprayed it into neighboring fields.

GREENE: Neighboring fields where crops are not immune to it.

CHARLES: Exactly - where crops are sensitive to this. And this isn't just - you know, when they started spraying this year, the complaints rolled in. I mean, it was most severe in Arkansas. But all across the Midwest, there are, you know, a couple of thousand complaints. Three million acres, apparently, have been damaged - mostly soybeans but also watermelon farms, vineyards, fruit trees, lots of different crops.

GREENE: So this must have farmers, I mean, furious.

CHARLES: Absolutely. So I've actually been down here in Arkansas for the past week, talking to farmers. And, you know, they talk about how it's kind of divided communities. It's ruined friendships. It's, you know - it turned acquaintances into adversaries. And the thing that makes people, you know, really angry, it seems like, is they're - they've had this - they know what herbicide drift looks like. And they've dealt with it before. But in this case, it's drifting, and they sometimes don't even know where it comes from. And so it's just - you know, they're pretty upset.

GREENE: Well - and is Arkansas alone in trying to stop this now, or are there other states that might follow suit?

CHARLES: It's alone right now. They've had this process - well, because it's most severe here. And they've come to this conclusion that, you know, they can't control this herbicide. And so they're just going to ban it for the summer. It's really not clear what other states are going to do. It's not clear what the federal EPA is going to do. Monsanto, for its part, says this is not a problem if farmers use it correctly. We just train farmers, and the problems will go away.

GREENE: NPR's Dan Charles talking to us from Forrest City, Ark. Dan, thanks.

CHARLES: Thank you.

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EPA Clarifies FEMA Statement On Texas Toxic Sites

September 24, 2017 9:26 PM

Filed Under: EPA, FEMA, Superfund sites, Texas, toxic sites

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WASHINGTON (AP) — The Environmental Protection Agency said Sunday it has recovered 517 containers filled with unidentified, potentially hazardous material found floating in or washed up along Texas waterways after the devastating floods from Hurricane Harvey receded.

The agency's statement sought to clarify an earlier media release saying the containers were recovered from highly contaminated toxic waste sites.

The EPA said that statement issued Friday night by the Federal Emergency Management Agency created confusion by conflating two separate issues.

FRIENDSWOOD, TX – SEPTEMBER 04: A view of a building on the Brio Superfund site on September 4, 2017 in Friendswood, Texas. 13 of the 41 Superfund sites in Texas remain flooded following Hurricane Harvey but it is unclear if chemicals and pollutants from the the facilities were able to escape in floodwaters. Over a week after Hurricane Harvey hit Southern Texas, residents are beginning the long process of recovering from the storm. (Photo by Justin Sullivan/Getty Images)

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The FEMA media release summarizing the federal response Harvey's historic floods said EPA had "conducted assessments of 43 Superfund sites and recovered 517 containers of unidentified, potentially hazardous material."

The Associated Press reported about the statement Saturday afternoon, after EPA's press office did not responded to questions sent by email to top staffers the night before.

"EPA and our response partners have been collecting containers orphaned after the hurricane," David Gray, a spokesman for EPA's regional headquarters in Texas, said in an email to AP on Sunday. "These are not related to Superfund clean ups."

Gray did not respond to questions about why he and other EPA press staff had not sought to clarify the issue for more than 44 hours. Also left unanswered are questions about the results of EPA's assessments at two highly contaminated Houston-area Superfund sites flooded by Harvey's record shattering rains.

EPA has not responded to more than a dozen calls and emails from AP over the last two weeks.

AP reported Sept. 18 that a government hotline had received calls about three separate spills at the U.S. Oil Recovery Superfund site, a former petroleum waste processing plant outside Houston contaminated with a dangerous brew of cancer-causing chemicals.

Records obtained by the AP showed workers at the site reported spills of unknown materials in unknown amounts affecting nearby Vince Bayou. Local pollution control officials photographed three large tanks that had been used to store potentially hazardous waste completely underwater on Aug. 29.

EPA has still not disclosed the spills or what was in the tanks before they flooded. The agency says its staff visited the site the following week and saw no visual evidence of contaminants in the bayou.

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NEWS > ENVIRONMENT

Colorado landfills are illegally burying low-level radioactive waste from oil and gas industry, Denver Post learns

Colorado health officials are trying to stop the practice and make new rules for low-level radioactive waste

Photo provided by Pawnee Waste LLC

Construction crews are building a new landfill near Grover to handle oil and gas industry waste, including low-level radioactive waste. They will use clay and plastic liners to protect land and groundwater.

By **BRUCE FINLEY** | bfinley@denverpost.com | The Denver Post

PUBLISHED: September 22, 2017 at 6:30 am | UPDATED: September 25, 2017 at 1:54 am

Colorado landfills have been illegally burying low-level radioactive waste from the oil and gas industry that they are not approved to handle, state health officials revealed this week.

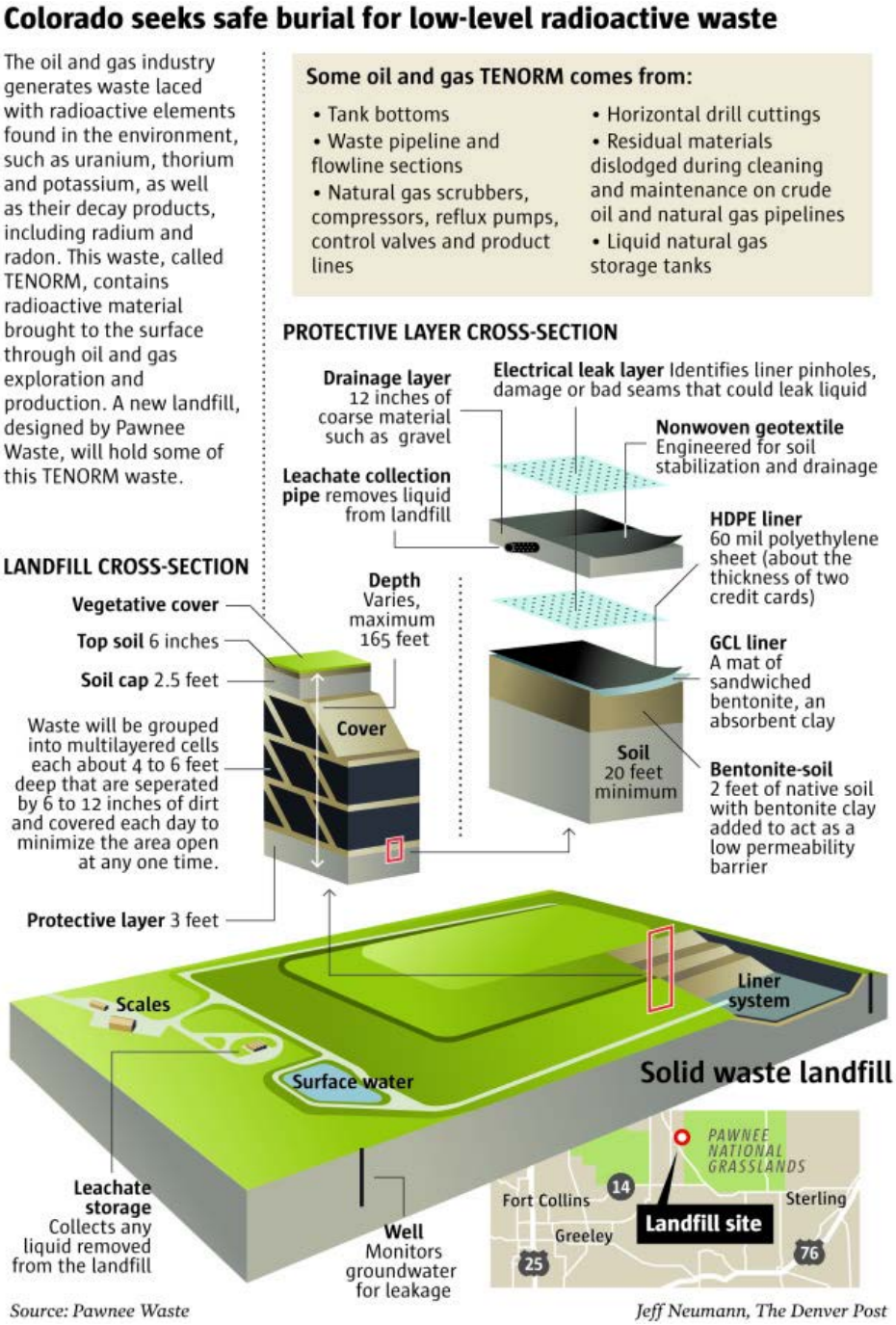
State health regulators, confirming at a meeting with local governments the disposal of unknown amounts at ordinary landfills, are trying to prohibit the practice and buttress their oversight. Colorado's booming oil and gas industry produces millions of tons of waste, some of it radioactive, and both waste producers and landfill operators are obligated to handle it properly.

"There is some of it that is just going to solid waste landfills. … It is probably, mostly, staying in state," Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment hazardous materials and waste management director Gary Baughman said at the meeting Wednesday.

CDPHE regulators said they don't know of any "imminent" threat to public health, noting that landfill operators must monitor water that leaches through waste.

But state officials asked cities and counties to help stop improper disposal of the industry's so-called technologically enhanced naturally occurring radioactive materials (TENORM) — sludge from filter bags, pipelines and storage tanks, and possibly drill cuttings. Radioactive materials can cause cancer.

Landfills authorized to accept radioactive materials must use liners and other protective barriers to protect land and water. All landfill operators must ask waste haulers to characterize their loads, especially if they could hurt public health and the environment.



CDPHE environment programs director Martha Rudolph said lawmakers must help by fixing a glitch in state laws. A solid waste statute requires CDPHE to prohibit disposal of radioactive waste at landfills not designed and designated to handle it safely. CDPHE also is charged with regulating radioactive materials. But a provision in the radioactive materials statute says CDPHE cannot regulate disposal of those materials.

Lawmakers should give clarity by removing that last provision, Rudolph said, and CDPHE then would create a new rule for putting low-level radioactive waste in landfills after hearing from companies and Colorado residents.

Today, only two landfills are approved to accept low-level radioactive waste routinely. And a new, specialized Pawnee Waste facility east of Fort Collins is being built, with 350,000 cubic yards of dirt excavated so far, to dispose of up to 15 million tons of the oil and gas industry's radioactive waste. Pawnee officials said they'll open it in November and that plastic liners, clay barriers and electronic leak-detection sensors will protect land and groundwater.

Oil and gas companies in Colorado, extracting fossil fuels from more than 55,000 wells, generate roughly 500,000 tons of solid waste per year, including low-level radioactive waste.

"It is in the industry's best interest to mitigate long-term risks. And it is in the public's best interest. This radiation lasts for a long time," Pawnee project manager Jane Witheridge said. "If we don't treat it differently from municipal solid waste, we would not be serving either the industry or the environment as it should be in Colorado. This is being done in North Dakota. It is being done in Texas."

The Pawnee landfill "will be a great place to send" radioactive waste "but it is probably not enough" to handle all the waste the industry is likely to produce in the future, said Joe Schieffelin, CDPHE's solid waste program manager. "That's one of the pieces of information we are trying to get from the oil and gas industry."

CDPHE regulators don't know how much low-level radioactive waste has been disposed of improperly at landfills, Schieffelin said. "We don't have information on the concentrations, either," he said.

Operators of existing landfills have raised questions about CDPHE's push for "a rule-making" to govern disposal of low-level radioactive waste in landfills. State officials told Front Range local officials from Weld County and as far south as Trinidad that they view them as partners in making sure landfills are safe. Once CDPHE approves landfills, local governments issue permits that let the landfills receive waste.

Waste Management Inc. officials, who run seven landfills in Colorado, said Thursday that they are collaborating with CDPHE and others to clarify procedures related to disposal of naturally occurring radioactive material, which is present everywhere.

"Waste Management of Colorado does not accept low-level radioactive waste," company spokeswoman Isha Cogborn said.

The Colorado Oil and Gas Association, a fossil fuels industry trade group, did not respond to questions, but it issued a statement indicating COGA doesn't see disposal of low-level radioactive waste in landfills as a problem.

"While circumstances may be different in other states, there have been no indications this is an issue for oil and gas waste in Colorado," reads the statement attributed to COGA president Dan Haley. "We have spoken with the state, with members of the waste industry, and others to begin exploring the realities of this matter."

Some companies have approached Pawnee about using the new landfill.

It is unclear whether CDPHE is taking enforcement action in cases where radioactive waste was buried illegally in unapproved landfills.

A May 12 letter from Schieffelin to landfill operators alerted them that CDPHE "has become aware of a potential issue" of landfills accepting waste containing radioactive material. Landfills cannot accept such waste "unless a landfill is specifically designated for that purpose," the letter said.

"By accepting TENORM in general and (industry) exploration and production TENORM waste in particular, your landfill could be in violation of the law. Many sites are not characterizing potential TENORM materials and, therefore, the department is concerned that many sites may be unknowingly in violation."

Legal responsibility shifts from waste generators to landfill operators once waste is accepted. If improper waste hasn't been characterized accurately, the landfill operator can seek remedies from waste generators.

Only Clean Harbors landfill in Adams County and the Southside Landfill in Pueblo County are approved to routinely handle low-level radioactive waste, CDPHE records show.

In 2016, Pawnee got approval from CDPHE and Weld County for its landfill designed to handle radioactive waste. Pawnee officials say it will protect groundwater against radioactive contamination with a high-density polyethylene synthetic liner and clay barriers. The waste would be buried in containers, with electronic sensors to detect leaks, all kept at least 20 feet away from groundwater.

Some landfills recently received case-by-case approvals from state or local authorities to dispose of oil and gas industry low-level radioactive waste, Baughman said.

"It has become clear that what we have out there is an un-level playing field at solid waste landfills," he told local government officials.

TAGS: **CANCER**, **COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT**, **COLORADO OIL AND GAS COMMISSION**, **HAZARDOUS WASTE**, **MORE BUSINESS NEWS**, **NUCLEAR WASTE**, **OIL AND GAS**, **POLLUTION**, **WASTE**, **WATER**

Bruce Finley of The Denver Post

Bruce Finley

Bruce Finley covers environment issues, the land air and water struggles shaping Colorado and the West. Finley grew up in Colorado, graduated from Stanford, then earned masters degrees in international relations as a Fulbright scholar in Britain and in journalism at Northwestern. He is also a lawyer and previously handled international news with on-site reporting in 40 countries.

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Questions Surround Chromium At LANL, $9M Project Brings More Water To Navajo Communities

By MEGAN KAMERICK (/PEOPLE/MEGAN-KAMERICK) • 23 MINUTES AGO

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CREATIVE COMMONS

Extent Of Los Alamos Chromium Contamination Still Uncertain – *Santa Fe New Mexican, Associated Press*

A top official with the U.S. Energy Department says the agency is still uncertain about the extent of contamination from a massive plume of chromium that resulted from decades of poor waste management at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Doug Hintze with the Energy Department's environmental management field office in Los Alamos told state lawmakers during a recent hearing that cancer-causing chromium and other chemicals have continued to seep from the soil in Mortandad Canyon into the groundwater.

The Santa Fe New Mexican reports (http://bit.ly/2yzIJ7f) that chromium was detected at concentrations five times the state limit in July in a newly drilled well outside the perimeter of the plume.

Lawmakers say they plan to appeal to New Mexico's congressional delegates and request more federal funds to expedite cleanup.

Oversight Panel: Nuclear Lab Workers Violated Safety Rules –*Santa Fe New Mexican, Associated Press*

Workers at Los Alamos National Laboratory producing a shell for a triggering device for nuclear weapons violated safety rules in August by storing too much material at one location in a facility for plutonium.

A memo from the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board called the Aug. 18 incident at LANL a "criticality safety event" and said workers there discovered the placement error three days later when they moved the grapefruit-sized shell again.

The memo says workers at that point failed to follow proper reporting procedures. It doesn’t specify whether the shell itself contained plutonium.

The Santa Fe New Mexican reports (http://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local_news/report-lanl-twice-violated-nuclear-safety-standards-in-aug/article_6692f11d-6c8d-5b4c-8f5d-1972330d3df6.html#utm_source=santafenewmexican.com&utm_campaign=%2Fnewsletters%2Fyour-morning-headlines%2F%3F-dc%3D1506164402&utm_medium=email&utm_content=headline) a second incident in August resulted in nearly a dozen workers being exposed to alpha particles, with some contamination on protective clothing and one worker’s hand.

Efforts to obtain comment from the federal agency that oversees Los Alamos weren't immediately successful. The lab said in a statement "there was no criticality accident" and that the lab "takes criticality safety very seriously and is conducting a full fact finding." In physics, the term criticality refers to the point at which a nuclear reaction is self-sustaining.

New Mexico Pursuit, Shootout Ends With Suspect In Custody – *Roswell Daily Record, Associated Press*

New Mexico authorities say a man is in custody after a pursuit and shootout.

The Roswell Daily Record reports (http://bit.ly/2yBtg6X) that no officers were injured, but the suspect is believed to have been hit by gunfire at least three times.

Authorities say the suspect, 30-year-old Jose Manual Diaz Montelongo, is expected to recover.

The incident began Sunday when authorities were called to investigate a possible drunken driver passed out behind the wheel. Once police got there, the suspect drove off.

There was a brief standoff before the suspect fled, driving through fences. Authorities believe he fired shots at officers as he left.

He stopped again, gunfire was exchanged and his last attempt to drive away was unsuccessful.

Authorities say Montelongo has a record and was wanted by federal authorities on a drug trafficking charge.

KRQE-TV reports (http://krqe.com/2017/09/24/state-police-investigate-officer-involved-shooting/)New Mexico State Police, Roswell Police and the Sheriff's Office are investigating the shooting.

Filmmaker, Family Begin New Look At New Mexico Cold Case – *KRQE-TV, Associated Press*

Nearly three decades since a 19-year-old woman disappeared from her small New Mexico town, the family with the help of a former friend and filmmaker are still searching for answers.

KRQE-TV reported (http://bit.ly/2fq5vdd) last week that filmmaker Melinda Esquibel began a new investigation into the disappearance of Tara Calico whose case has remained unsolved since she went missing from Belen in September 1988.

Esquibel with help from Calico's family began a documentary film project examining the vanishing of her high school friend, but that examination became an investigation after finding the case files in disorder. She also began releasing what they have learned in a podcast.

Esquibel says progress has been made on the case, and they're sharing the information they gather with law enforcement agencies.

Fort Sill Apache Gets Grant To Build Fuel Station – *Las Cruces Sun-News, Associated Press*

The Fort Sill Apache Tribe has been awarded $800,000 from the federal government to help build a fuel station on its property in southern New Mexico.

Tribal Chairman Jeff Haozous tells the Las Cruces Sun-News (http://bit.ly/2nktMQw) that details still need to be worked out for the project at Akela Flats, but he believes it will be larger than a similar project the tribe recently started in Oklahoma.

That $2.5 million project includes construction of a 4,000-square-foot convenience store and a gas station.

Work on the New Mexico project is expected to begin next year.

The Fort Sill Apache Tribe is based in Oklahoma. But the federal government in 2011 designated a 30-acre parcel between Las Cruces and Deming as the tribe's reservation. The tribe first acquired the land in 1998.

New Mexico School Board Opts For Bilingual Pledge – *Las Cruces Sun-News, Associated Press*

The Pledge of Allegiance will soon be recited in both English and Spanish at school board meetings in Las Cruces.

Board Chairwoman Maria Flores made the request that the pledge be recited in Spanish starting at the next public meeting.

Las Cruces Superintendent Greg Ewing told the Las Cruces Sun-News (http://bit.ly/2fmtcDg) that students are entitled under law to choose to have part of their education in Spanish and that reciting the pledge in Spanish during board meetings will be a wonderful experience for students.

He says inclusivity is the goal.

Districts in Albuquerque and Santa Fe have been reciting the pledge in both languages for years.

Archaeologists: More Protections Needed For Chaco Region - *By Susan Montoya Bryan, Associated Press*

Archaeologists and other researchers are calling for more protections of an expansive area surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park.

In a report released Friday, they say increased oil and gas development in northwestern New Mexico has the potential to destroy parts of the landscape that could provide a better understanding of the ancient civilization that once inhabited the area.

The report comes as federal officials revamp a management plan that will guide development as more companies look to tap the region's shale deposits.

A world heritage site, Chaco and its outlying archaeological remnants have become the focus of the fight over expanded drilling.

Outside park boundaries, scientists say new technology has uncovered indiscernible sections of ancient roads. They also pointed to less tangible features that could be at risk, such as views of distant buttes or mountain peaks.

$9.1M Project To Deliver More Water To Navajo Communities – *Associated Press*

Work has started on a $9.1 million project to improve access to water in several Navajo communities.

Navajo President Russell Begaye signed legislation last year to fund dozens of water and sanitation projects across the reservation.

Officials gathered in Greasewood on Friday for a groundbreaking ceremony for one of the projects. It's being funded partly through a $554 million settlement the tribe reached with the federal government over management of natural resources revenue.

Rex Kontz of the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority says the project will double the water capacity for several communities, including Ganado, Greasewood, Dilkon and Teesto. A new well and a water filtering plant are planned.

The work is expected to take 18 months.

Other funding sources include federal grants and the tribal utility.

Handful Of Prescribed Fires Planned For New Mexico District – *Associated Press*

Fire officials with a ranger district on the Lincoln National Forest in southern New Mexico are planning a handful of prescribed fires over the next several months to clear out dead trees and reduce fuel loads.

Officials on the Sacramento Ranger District say the work is scheduled to begin in October and run through next April as long as weather conditions permit.

The prescribed fires will target a total of about 3,200 acres (1,295 hectares) around the communities of Mayhill, Weed and Cloudcroft. The largest of the projects will involve the burning of more than 2,100 acres (850 hectares) about 5 miles southwest of Weed.

Officials say reducing forest fuels can help minimize future wildfire risks.

They also warned that smoke may be visible during the prescribed fires.

Eastern New Mexico To Drop Out-Of-State Tuition – *Associated Press*

Eastern New Mexico University says it's lowering tuition for out-of-state students next year.

The small university said Friday that its board of regents approved the drop in cost and that it will take effect in fall 2018.

Currently, out-of-state students pay 203 percent of what in-state students do. That'll be down to 150 percent.

The 2016-2017 tuition cost was roughly $6,000 for in-state students and a little over $15,000 for out-of-state students.

ENMU says it wants students to graduate with as little debt as possible and that it hopes to recruit more students from outside New Mexico.

New Mexico Regulators Consider Utility's Power Plan – *Albuquerque Journal, Associated Press*

New Mexico's largest electric provider wants to add another 50 megawatts of solar energy to its portfolio.

Public Service Co. of New Mexico also wants to boost output from its current wind and geothermal resources as part of a plan to comply with the state's renewable energy standards.

The state Public Regulation Commission wrapped up hearings on the proposal this week.

The Albuquerque Journal reports (http://bit.ly/2hmaT1o) that one environmental group has taken issue with the plan, saying the utility stacked the deck to gain ownership over the new solar farms rather than considering purchase agreements with independent power producers.

Utility officials and other environmentalists dismissed those arguments, saying the plan was more cost effective.

If approved, the utility would pay Albuquerque-based Affordable Solar to build five small solar farms.

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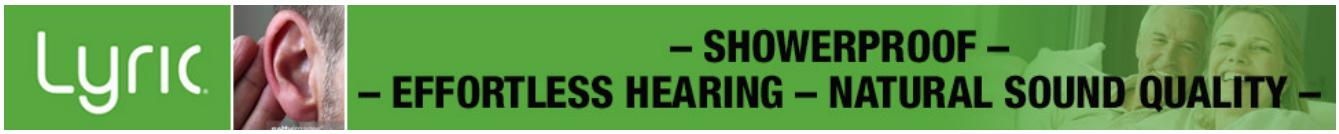

LOUISIANA ENVIRONMENT AND FLOOD CONTROL

Carp, clams and crested floating-hearts: Louisiana on alert for invasive species

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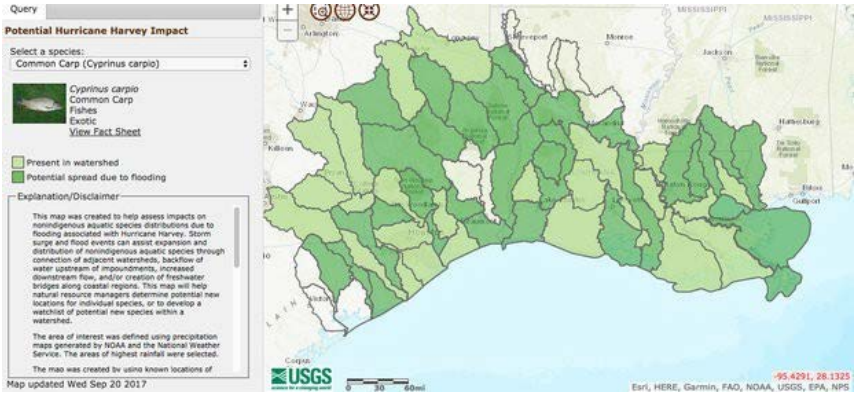
Updated on September 25, 2017 at 6:01 AM
Posted on September 25, 2017 at 6:00 AM



A new USGS web-based application shows where invasive species potential spread through Hurricane Harvey flood waters.

12
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By Sara Sneath
NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune

Hurricane Harvey flushed thousands of people from their homes in southeast Texas. It might also have flushed common carp, Asian clams and a flower called the crested floating-heart across the Texas boarder into Louisiana.

That's the premise behind a new web-based application developed by the U.S. Geological Survey to track invasive species. It assumes that Harvey's floodwaters created news pathways by which aquatic species could move from one body of water to another.

"The little app that we put together is brand new," said Pam Fuller, a Geological Survey invasive species biologist who developed the app. "We've got a lot of people who are very pleased with it; they think it's a great tool to use. It's also reached the attention of people at FEMA."

The application has a drop-down menu listing invasive species such as frogs, fish, mollusks and plants. Once the user selects a species, a color-coded map shows water systems that are known to have that species and water systems where the species had the potential to spread via Harvey's flooding.

One way that aquatic invasive species move from one water body to another is when nearby rivers crest, Fuller said. Their floodwaters intermingle, along with the critters and plants in them.

Another way is when freshwater pours out the mouth of adjacent rivers into a bay. The river water can create a freshwater zone that acts as a bridge between the rivers, allowing species to migrate from one stream to the other.

Invasive species can cause expensive problems. Fighting them in the United States costs $137 billion annually, according to the Center for Bioenvironmental Research. In New Orleans, $300 million is spent annually just on damage and control efforts for Formosan termites, according to the center.

The new app can help natural resource managers identify problem species that spread in Harvey's floodwaters, Fuller said. It also can help identify where to focus decontamination efforts, such as draining boats that traversed floodwaters to avoid spreading zebra mussels.

Fuller is working on developing a similar application for Hurricane Irma. It will launch in about a week, she said.

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Sara Sneath covers Louisiana coastal issues for NOLA.com | The Times Picayune. Reach her at ssneath@nola.com. Follow her on Twitter @SaraSneath.

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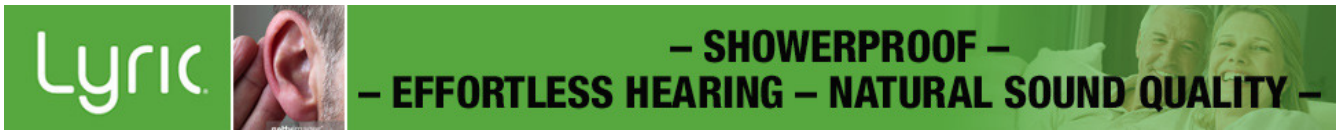

NEW ORLEANS OPINIONS

Ignoring science won't end environmental problems | Opinion

78

Updated on September 24, 2017 at 6:46 AM
Posted on September 24, 2017 at 6:45 AM

The Environmental Protection headquarters in Washington, Aug, 7, 2017. The agency's new leader, Scott Pruitt, has made no secret of his intent to undo years of regulations on everything from water pollution to climate change; he has also sought to conceal his work from the public and even his own employees. (Tom Brenner/The New York Times)

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By Bob Marshall, columnist

This just in: *WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Urged on by cheering crowds in Make America Great Again caps and GOP congressmen from oil producing states, President Trump last night stood on the steps of the Environmental Protection Agency Building and proclaimed "Carbon today! Carbon tomorrow! Carbon forever!"*

He then put a torch to a 100-foot tall stack of climate research reports, science textbooks, first editions of "On the Origin of Species" -- and an effigy of Al Gore.

"We will purge the nation and our schools of the science that is a threat to our traditions and our way of life!" the president shouted. "We will rid our country of the plague of science wherever we find it!"

OK, that didn't happen. But the Trump administration shows every sign of moving in that direction.

One probably has to go back to Word War II to find a similar period when the United States experienced the kind of federal censorship that has been under way in the nine months since Trump took office. Only this time our president isn't trying to protect us from armed enemies intent on our destruction.

Just the opposite.

This censorship is aimed at facts -- at science and scientists -- who are showing us how to be safe.

A sampling of his efforts thus far:

EPA website removes climate science site from public view after two decades

NIH unit deletes references to climate 'change'

Trump silences government scientists with gag orders

As Arctic sea ice decline, budget cuts leave scientists blind

Administration wants to cut EPA by 31 percent - more than any other agency

Coal Mining Health Study Is Halted by Interior Department

Trump administration eliminating Arctic and Climate Envoys

EPA ends sponsorship of climate leadership program

The Trump administration just disbanded a federal advisory committee on climate change

Energy Sec. Rick Perry ignores his own grid study in promoting more fossil fuels

Next wave of EPA science advisers could include those who question climate change

EPA: air pollution rule should be delayed - despite its effect on children

EPA chief, rejecting agency's own analysis, declines to ban pesticide despite health concerns

Climate-Friendly Energy Star Program Could be Cut

Trump begins rollback of Obama's car pollution standards to curb emissions

Scientists around the world are worried about a Trump team proposal to ax NASA's 58-year mission to study the Earth

EPA moves to rewrite rules on coal power plant wastewater

Louisiana scientist among researchers purged from Interior Dept. for telling the truth about climate

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Trump administration halts pollution controls at Utah plants

Idaho Drops Climate Change Language From K-12 Science Curriculum

New Mexico high school curriculum would change "climate change" to climate "fluctuations"

Their effort to control the spread of truth in the Internet age would be laughable or just insulting if the consequences were not so serious. Many of this nation's highest elected officials -- all whom have taken oaths to protect the public -- are not only trying to deny

the conclusive science on the causes and consequences of warming, they are trying to stop further research.

There is a rich irony in the fact that most of this anti-science agenda is being pushed by political conservatives, a group that professes fealty to the idea that our democracy should be guided by the winners from the "free marketplace of ideas." Well, the scientific process that delivered the overwhelming consensus on the disasters confronting us if we do not reduce emissions is one of the greatest examples of an open competition of ideas. Research only gains consensus after it has been tested again and again and again. In this case, the results have almost always been the same -- and often more alarming.

Yet when it comes to climate science we have an administration and members of its supporting party not only determined to limit that competition of ideas, but to also pre-determine its winner.

Politicians and governments only engage in censorship when they are afraid the truth will harm their wallets or their power. In this case we have both, because those with the power to censor science arrived in office on the wallets of the industries fighting the truth.

Yes, truth always wins in the end, because it eventually becomes too obvious to deny. Unfortunately, our children will suffer the consequences for that delay.

Bob Marshall, former Outdoors editor for The Times-Picayune and former environmental reporter for The Lens, will be writing a regular column. He can be reached at bmarshallenviro@gmail.co

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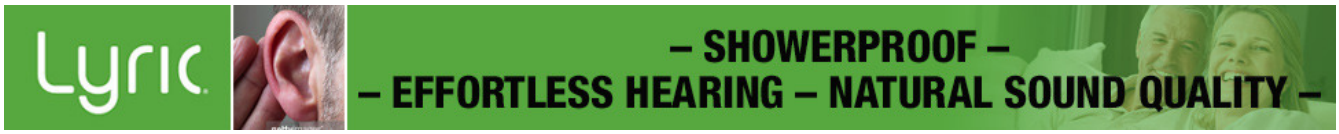

LOUISIANA ENVIRONMENT AND FLOOD CONTROL

Weird creatures washing ashore, shrimping with diversions: This week's coastal news

Comment

Updated on September 24, 2017 at 9:48 PM
Posted on September 22, 2017 at 4:19 PM

A dead Risso's dolphin was discovered on Grand Isle Sept.15. Photo by Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

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By Sara Sneath
NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune

Hurricanes Harvey and Irma pushed some unusual stuff ashore. A strange-looking eel was found on a Texas City, Texas, beach, and a historic-looking canoe was discovered in Cocoa, Fla.

In Grand Isle, officials responded to what they first thought was another whale washing ashore. It was later identified as Risso's dolphin.

Coastal reporters Travis Lux of WWNO radio and Sara Sneath of NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune discussed the unusual beach findings, as well as a new report on how the commercial shrimp industry might adjust to sediment diversions. Listen to their discussion above or Friday (Sept. 22) at 4:44 p.m. on WWNO.

Louisiana's 2017 coastal master plan calls for sediment diversion on both sides of the Mississippi River in Plaquemines Parish. The state wants to use controlled gates in the river levees to reintroduce river water and sediment to the surrounding marshes. Some commercial fishers worry the effort could devastate species that depend on the current balance of freshwater and saltwater.

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Sara Sneath covers Louisiana coastal issues for NOLA.com | The Times Picayune. Reach her at ssneath@nola.com. Follow her on Twitter @SaraSneath.

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CDC: Mosquitoes carrying Zika, other deadly viruses could breed in 75 percent of the US

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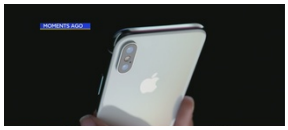
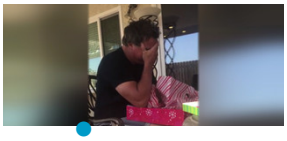
Stephanie Toone - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
2:56 p.m Friday, Sept. 22, 2017 Filed in Atlanta News

What You Should Know About Zika
Inform

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According to a CDC study, up to 75 percent of the contiguous United States may provide suitable conditions for several species of disease-spreading mosquitoes.

The recent study, published in the Public Journal of Entomology, found 71 percent of counties in the 48 contiguous states were suitable for the aegypti species and 75 percent could support albopictus species.

»RELATED: Zika Virus: What's the big deal? A lot. Here's what you need to know

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Researchers found that the dengue, chikungunya and Zika viruses in particular represented a "growing public health threat in parts of the United States where they are established," according to the journal's report.

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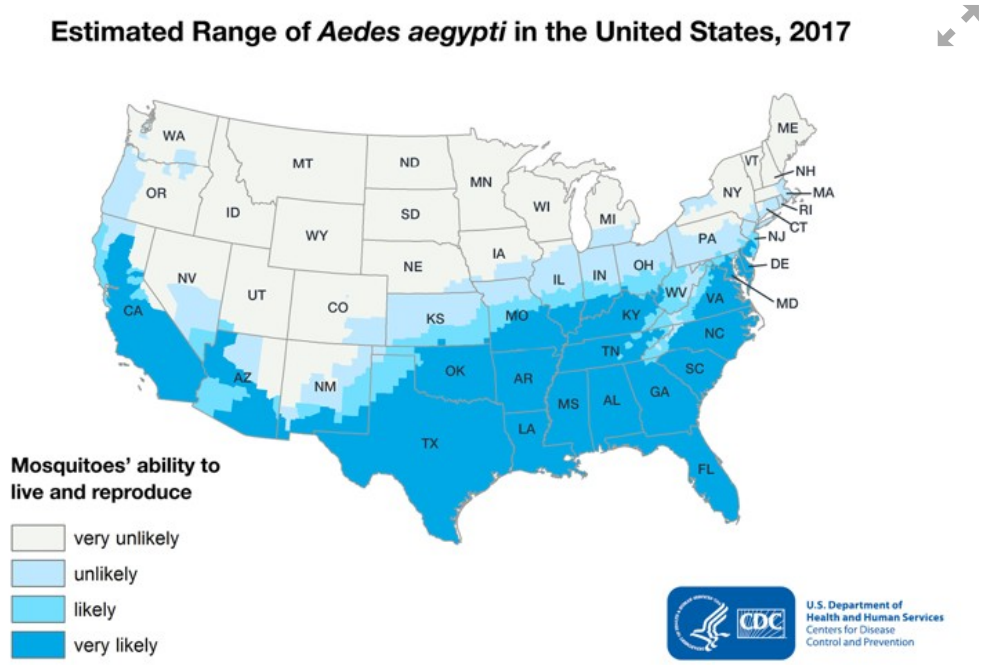
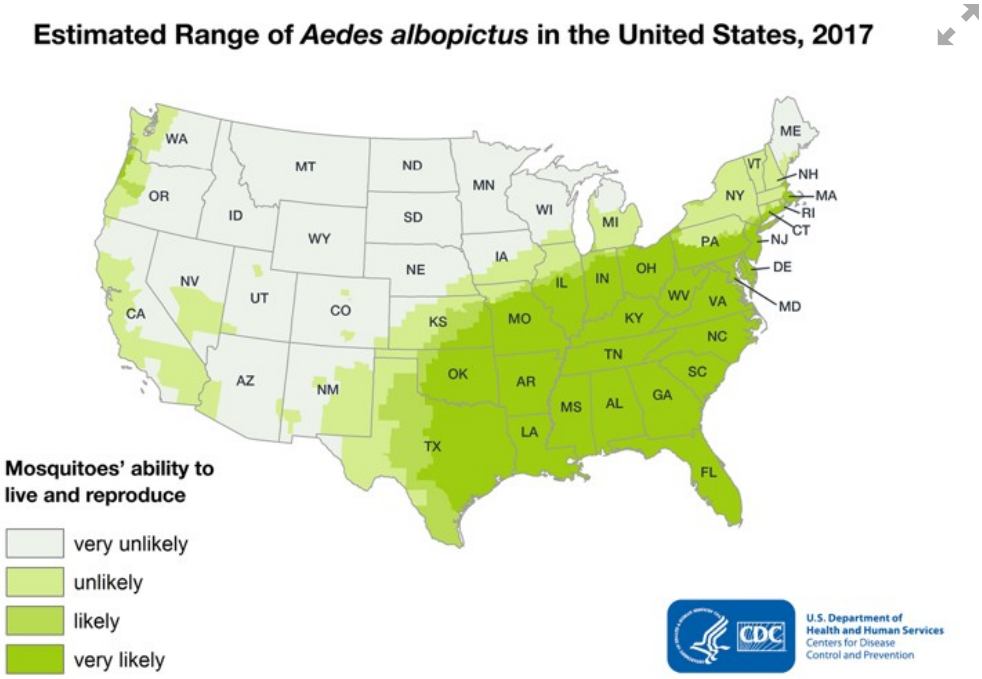


CDC has updated the estimated range maps for *Aedes aegypti* and *Ae. albopictus* mosquitoes by using a model that predicts possible geographic ranges for these mosquitoes in the contiguous United States. The model used county-level records, historical records, and suitable climate variables to predict the likelihood (very low, low, moderate, or high that these mosquitoes could survive and reproduce if introduced to an area during the months when mosquitoes are locally active. Maps are not meant to represent risk for spread of any specific disease. (See Johnson TL et al. Modeling the environmental suitability for *Aedes (Stegomyia) aegypti* and *Aedes (Stegomyia) albopictus* (Dipter: Culicidae) in the contiguous United States. *Jrl Med Entomol*. Sept. 2017;[ahead of print].)



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The maps show the CDC's "best estimate" of

potential ranges of where Ae. aegypti and Ae. albopictus mosquitoes could survive and reproduce if introduced. The maps do not show where the mosquitoes are currently nor where there is a risk of transmission, Rebecca Eisen, a research biologist with the CDC, said in a statement.

“In other words, these maps show areas where CDC predicts Aedes aegypti and albopictus mosquitoes could survive and reproduce if introduced to an area during the months when mosquitoes are locally active,” Eisen told the publication.

Temperature is a key factor. If there were just one day in winter on average when the temperature exceeds 50 degrees Fahrenheit, the chances that the area would be suitable for mosquitoes increased. Areas with consistently cold temperatures, however, have reduced chances that the insects’ eggs would sustain through the winter, specifically for aegypti, according to Eisen. Rainfall had a significant influence on albopictus, as it relies more on water courses filled by rainwater to lay its eggs than aegypti.

The maps will help health professionals monitor for signs of the mosquitoes.

“Surveillance efforts can be focused in counties where Aedes aegypti and albopictus could survive and reproduce if introduced to an area during the months when mosquitoes are locally active or at least survive during summer months if introduced,” Eisen said.

The CDC suggested taking the following steps to avoid mosquitoes and potential disease:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and trousers
- Stay in places with air conditioning or that use window and door screens
- Use insect repellents approved by the Environmental Protection Agency, treating clothing with an insecticide, permethrin.

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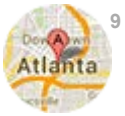

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Exxon Mobil launches new methane emissions reduction program

Jordan Blum, Houston Chronicle **Updated 8:07 am, Monday, September 25, 2017**

Southwestern Energy workers check on a suspected pipe leak at a well pad site in Damascus, Ark., June 28, 2016. The reputation of natural gas as a 'clean energy' in the fight against climate change rests in part on the abilities of workers tracking down and eliminating methane leaks in the nation's pipeline infrastructure. (Andrea Morales/The New York Times)

Exxon Mobil is launching a new program focused on reducing methane emissions and leaks from its U.S. oil and gas production and pipelines.

The project is focusing on installing environmentally efficient equipment and more leak-detection sensors throughout its onshore shale oil and gas operations in the U.S.

Exxon Mobil's XTO Energy subsidiary is leading the project.

The energy sector - including oil and gas production and coal mining - is the largest source of U.S. methane emissions, which are a major contributor to the planet's greenhouse gas emissions, according to the U.S. Energy Department. Methane is a primary component of natural gas, and the surging gas production from the shale boom has given rise to increasing methane emissions throughout much of the past 15 years.

"We need to minimize our impact on the environment," said XTO President Sara Ortwein. "Focusing on emissions reductions - and here with methane - is one more step."

XTO recently completed a pilot project in West Texas' Permian Basin. While that's primarily an oil-producing region, much of the Permian also produces lots of associated natural gas from the shale rock formations.

Exxon Mobil is starting a three-year phase out of all of its gas-powered devices on its production equipment that control the various valves, pressure levels and more, which are called high-bleed pneumatic devices. The equipment emits methane and is being replaced with lower-emission designs that use compressed air instead.

XTO also will add more lead-detection equipment to its pipelines and its gathering and processing equipment out near oil and gas fields.

Ortwein said Exxon Mobil is making a sizable financial equipment to this project, but that it's just underway and the amount of money needed is yet to be determined.

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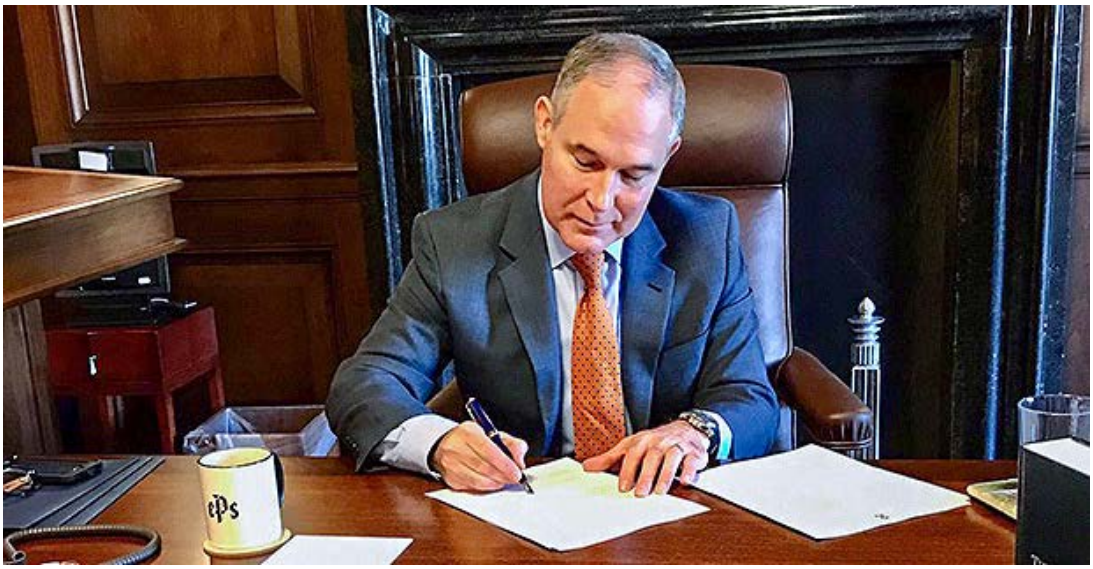
THE LEADER IN ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT NEWS

EPA

Pruitt plans to release schedule

Kevin Bogardus, E&E News reporter
Published: Friday, September 22, 2017



U.S. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt will soon release his schedule to the public. @EPA ScottPruitt/Twitter

U.S. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt is planning to release his public calendar, long sought by his critics on Capitol Hill and in the environmental movement.

Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.), ranking member on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, offered faint praise for the move by Pruitt. Earlier this year, the Democratic senator had called on the EPA chief to release his schedule on a monthly basis (***E&E News PM***, March 17).

"I urged the new administrator to commit to transparency at the agency and make his calendar available back in March. Since then, my requests have been ignored, but perhaps this is a turning point," Carper said in a statement yesterday.

"I hope that this is a step in the right direction, but, as the song goes, 'we've only just begun.' I am hopeful that Administrator Pruitt will continue to focus on responses to my other outstanding requests for information."

Carper added that he was unwilling to move forward on EPA nominees until the agency proves more responsive to Democrats' requests for information.

An EPA spokeswoman told E&E News that Pruitt was releasing his calendar for "full transparency" and challenged Carper to do the same.

"In full transparency, EPA is making Administrator Pruitt's schedule publicly available; given that transparency in scheduling is so important to Ranking EPW Member Carper, we expect that he will do the same," said Liz Bowman, the agency spokeswoman.

Pruitt's schedule should be released soon.

In a voicemail left for E&E News earlier this week, an EPA employee in the general counsel's office said at the end of next week, the agency will post online Pruitt's public calendar for his entire tenure at the agency. The move by the agency comes after several Freedom of Information Act requests for the EPA chief's schedule.

Unlike Pruitt, past EPA administrators did release a public schedule on a periodic basis.

Typically, the public calendar was sparse on details and didn't include all of the agency leader's meetings. But it was considered to be a move toward transparency by EPA, which past Administrator Bill Ruckelshaus said the agency should strive for in his famous "Fishbowl Memo."

EPA administrators' private calendars, which usually have more details on meetings behind closed doors, have been released in the past under FOIA. Pruitt's private itinerary has come to light, too, at least during his early days at EPA.

E&E News obtained under FOIA Pruitt's calendar for roughly his first five weeks in office. The **document** showed that the EPA administrator was scheduled to meet with senior executives in the automotive, coal, oil and gas, and utility industries (***Greenwire***, June 15).

Several more FOIA requests by E&E News for Pruitt's private calendar remain unfulfilled today.

Twitter: **@KevinBogardus** | Email: **kbogardus@eenews.net**

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ARKANSAS

State advances herbicide ban, setting up Monsanto fight

Published: Friday, September 22, 2017

Arkansas officials have advanced a plan to ban farmers from using the controversial herbicide dicamba next summer, likely setting up a legal battle between the state and Monsanto Co., the maker of the chemical.

The Arkansas State Plant Board yesterday brought the state one step closer to solidifying a rule that would ban the herbicide between April 16 and Oct. 31 next year.

Arkansas farmers this summer sparked a public debate over the issue, with many saying dicamba destroys soybeans and other crops not genetically modified to tolerate the chemical when it drifts after being sprayed at other farms.

The state banned its use for 120 days in July. U.S. EPA is also reviewing the chemical, though an agency official said the herbicide will be available next year under federal rules (***Greenwire***, Sept. 20).

Monsanto has already started pushing back on Arkansas' proposed ban, saying it cannot be blamed for farmers misusing dicamba and not following labeling instructions.

"All options are on the table" for the company's next move, said Ty Vaughn, Monsanto's global regulatory vice president.

A state legislative subcommittee could give the ban final approval after a public hearing and public comment period (Tom Polansek, **Reuters**, Sept. 21). **— NS**

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TEXAS

After Harvey, experts worry about climate, dam safety

Published: Friday, September 22, 2017

As the oceans warm and extreme weather events like Hurricane Harvey become more common on the Gulf Coast, climatologists are warning that Texas' dams might not be up to the test.

Dams are generally designed with the most extreme scenario in mind, but weather experts say Harvey matched or exceeded the maximum amounts of rainfall that the state's dams are designed to hold off.

"The probable maximum precipitation amount should never be reached," said Tye Parzybok, the chief meteorologist at MetStat Inc., a Colorado-based company. "It should never get close to it."

The relationship between hurricanes and climate change is still uncertain. But there is widespread agreement among scientists that climate change causes warmer oceans and, in turn, more precipitation.

There are more than 4,000 dams in Texas, 1,200 of which are already considered high risk. Safety standards are based on historical rainfall data, but the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality already began updating those standards last year based on new trends.

"I'm not saying they're unsafe," said state climatologist John Nielsen-Gammon of Texas' dams. "They will be less safe than they were designed to be" (Ryan Maye Handy, ***Houston Chronicle***, Sept. 21). **— NS**

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ENERGY 2 DAYS AGO

Federal decision on solar panel imports could cost Texas jobs, slow down installations

Jeff Mosier, Energy and Environment Writer

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The U.S. International Trade Commission decided 4-0 Friday that imported solar cells and panels are threatening the domestic manufacturing industry, potentially setting the stage for President Donald Trump to set tariffs, a price floor or take some other action early next year.

The federal action is widely expected to increase the cost of residential and commercial solar projects, which have taken off thanks in part to cheap solar cells and panels. The $26 billion national industry employees 9,400 in Texas, according to The Solar Foundation.

"On behalf of the entire sola welcome this important step toward securing relief f ttered dozens of factories, leaving thousands of workers without jobs," said Juergen Stein, president and CEO of SolarWorld Americas, one of the companies petitioning the commission to take action.

Georgia-based Suniva filed the initial complaint in April, and SolarWorld, which has a large manufacturing facility in Oregon, later joined the petition.

The two petitioners argue that restricting imports would revive a segment of the domestic solar equipment manufacturing sector. But solar industry leaders fear the higher cost would slow down the solar-energy sector growth and prevent the creation of 88,000 new jobs.

Abigail Ross Hopper, president and CEO of the Solar Energy Industries Association, said that almost all the solar sector would suffer if prices were artificially increased. The industry grouping estimates that doubling the cost of imported solar cells and a price floor on panels would "destroy two-thirds of demand."

A federal decision threatens thousands of jobs in Texas' fast-growing solar industry

The commission announced Friday that solar cells and panels were "being imported into the United States in such increased quantities as to be a substantial cause of serious injury, or threat of serious injury."

The commission has scheduled a hearing next month on what action is needed to protect the domestic manufacturers. A recommendation would go to the president this fall.

Other countries would have the opportunity to challenge tariffs or similar actions at the World Trade Organization. The petitioners, SolarWorld Americas and Suniva, are asking for protection from imports for at least four years.

Deadlines for solar decision

Date	Action
Oct. 3, 2017	ITC hearing on potential remedies
Nov. 13, 2017	ITC decision due to President Donald Trump
Jan. 12, 2018	Trump deadline to decide on action
15 days after signing	When tariffs or other relief would take effect

SOURCE: DMN Research

"Any new tariffs are likely to increase costs and reduce demand for installations, disrupting the solar jobs market that now employs 260,000 workers in the United States and is valued in the tens of billions of dollars," said Andrea Luecke, president and executive director of The Solar Foundation.

Lesley Ritter, an assistant vice president at Moody's Investors Service, said in a written statement, that the decision would have "a negative impact on the economics of solar generation, and could dampen the pace of decarbonization."

Higher prices could also cost the federal government through the 30 percent tax credit it offers for solar projects. If the current 2018 forecast is accurate, taxpayers would pay an extra $1.23 billion in tax credits, according to an estimate from Cowen & Co. analyst Jeffrey Osborne.

Texas' moment in the sun; Lone Star State a powerful force in solar energy

Supporters of the trade action have argued that they are trying to rebalance the industry from 2016, when solar cell and panel prices cratered. The petitioners have blamed excess capacity produced for

"We brought this action because the U.S. solar manufacturing industry finds itself at the precipice of extinction at the hands of foreign market overcapacity," according to a statement from Suniva, one of the petitioners. "President Trump can remedy this injury with relief that ensures U.S. energy dominance that includes a healthy U.S. solar ecosystem and prevents China and its proxies from owning the sun."

John Berger, CEO of Houston-based residential solar installation company Sunnova, issued a harsh statement against the companies that filed the federal complaint.

"It is disappointing that two uniquely mismanaged and uncompetitive foreign-owned companies have been able to benefit from a process meant to protect U.S. businesses that have truly been harmed by subsidized foreign competition," Berger said.

The bankrupt Suniva is majority owned by a Chinese company, which opposed this trade case. A creditor in bankruptcy court has spearheaded this trade effort by Suniva. SolarWorld Americas' parent company is German and filed for insolvency, that country's version of bankruptcy.

Opponents of this trade case have emphasized the company's foreign ownership, seemingly to undercut their arguments about protecting U.S. manufacturing and jobs.

Bloomberg contributed to this report.

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State seeks more data before granting permit to hog farm in river's watershed

By Emily Walkenhorst twitter

This article was published September 23, 2017 at 2:59 a.m.

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The Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality sent a letter this week to the owners of C&H Hog Farms asking for more documentation of their facility and plans as the department continues to evaluate the facility's permit application.

The documents are already in the public record, Buffalo River Watershed Alliance board member Brian Thompson told the Arkansas Pollution Control and Ecology Commission on Friday. Thompson called the request, which allows C&H 90 days to respond, a delay tactic and an "affront to public trust."

"What's troubling is their giving C&H three months to provide documentation that's already in the public record," Thompson said. "This process could easily go on for another six months. The way it's going, maybe it could go on for another year."

C&H Hog Farms is located near Mount Judea in Newton County and sits on Big Creek about 6 miles from where the creek converges with the Buffalo National River.

The farm has drawn the ire of people concerned about the risk its hog manure poses to the Buffalo River. The facility is the only federally classified large hog farm in the river's watershed, which has been home to several small hog farms. C&H is currently permitted to house up to 6,000 piglets and 2,503 sows.

C&H applied for a new permit April 7, 2016, and has been operating under an extension of its old permit. The department held off making a preliminary decision on the new permit until February, after months of a Pollution Control and Ecology Commission appeal on another permit that sought to apply manure from C&H on land in the Buffalo River's watershed. The department accepted comments on the new permit application through early April of this year.

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The department requested geological site investigations performed at the facility; construction plans for its waste management system; information, including which water bodies are located nearby, related to the facility's nutrient management plan; status of the facility's manure storage ponds and the operation and maintenance plan for the pond levee.

Thompson delivered his statements during the public comment portion of the commission's meeting Friday, and no commissioners asked questions of Thompson.

After the meeting, department officials said they had requested the documents so they could be a part of the public record in C&H's new permit application and in response to public comments on C&H's permit application.

Department Director Becky Keogh said her agency did not have a deadline for deciding whether to issue a new permit to C&H Hog Farms.

While the Arkansas Legislature passed a law earlier this year giving the department six months to decide on Regulation 5 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits, C&H's permit is grandfathered into old law, according to Caleb Osborne, department associate director in charge of the office of water quality.

The department has explored ways to reduce the time it takes to issue new permits and permit modifications, but Keogh said C&H's permit was exceptional, given its controversy.

"This is a permit that is going to take time," she said.

The new permit indicates the facility would house up to six boars of about 450 pounds, 2,672 sows of at least 400 pounds and 750 piglets of about 14 pounds, and it estimates that the two waste-holding ponds would contain up to 2,337,074 gallons of hog manure, similar to what is contained now. Additional waste and wastewater would be applied over certain sites as fertilizer.

Metro on 09/23/2017

Print Headline: Hog farm permit decision put off; more data sought

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TEXAS

EPA clarifies earlier FEMA statement on Texas toxic sites

BY MICHAEL BIESECKER
Associated Press

SEPTEMBER 24, 2017 10:37 PM

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency said Sunday it has recovered 517 containers filled with unidentified, potentially hazardous material found floating in or washed up along Texas waterways after the devastating floods from Hurricane Harvey receded.

The agency's statement sought to clarify an earlier media release saying the containers were recovered from highly contaminated toxic waste sites. EPA said that statement issued Friday night by the Federal Emergency Management Agency created confusion by conflating two separate issues.

The FEMA media release summarizing the federal response Harvey's historic floods said EPA had "conducted assessments of 43 Superfund sites and recovered 517 containers of unidentified, potentially hazardous material."

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The Associated Press reported about the statement Saturday afternoon, after EPA's press office did not responded to questions sent by email to top staffers the night before.

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Gray did not respond to questions about why he and other EPA press staff had not sought to clarify the issue for more than 44 hours. Also left unanswered are questions about the results of EPA's assessments at two highly contaminated Houston-area Superfund sites flooded by Harvey's record shattering rains.

EPA has not responded to more than a dozen calls and emails from AP over the last two weeks.

AP reported Sept. 18 that a government hotline had received calls about three separate spills at the U.S. Oil Recovery Superfund site, a former petroleum waste processing plant outside Houston contaminated with a dangerous brew of cancer-causing chemicals.

Records obtained by the AP showed workers at the site reported spills of unknown materials in unknown amounts affecting nearby Vince Bayou. Local pollution control officials photographed three large tanks that had been used to store potentially hazardous waste completely underwater on Aug. 29.

EPA has still not disclosed the spills or what was in the tanks before they flooded. The agency says its staff visited the site the following week and saw no visual evidence of contaminants in the bayou.

—

Associated Press reporter Frank Bajak contributed from Houston.

—

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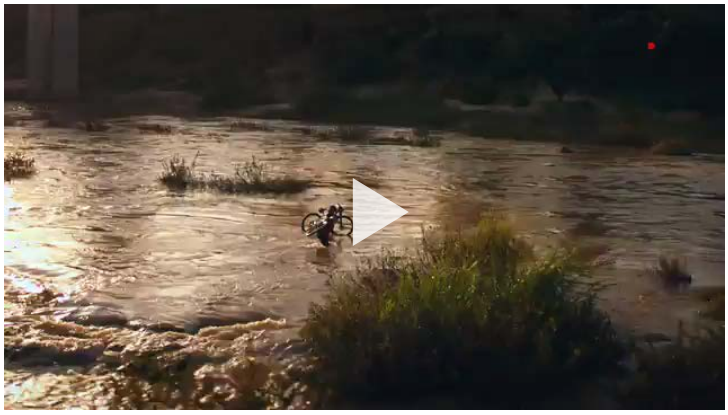

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HURRICANE NEWS AND STORM TRACKING

Why has the 2017 hurricane season been so bad?

22

Updated on September 23, 2017 at 4:01 PM
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By The Washington Post

The 2017 hurricane season has been a full-on assault from Mother Nature. We are under siege, and our attackers have benign names like Harvey and Irma and Maria. But they are callous, powerful, indiscriminate, terrifying, destructive, merciless and relentless.

Is Earth trying to eject us from the planet? Again and again and again the harshest of winds and hardest of rains has pounded on the most-defenseless territories we have. The Caribbean islands, hanging out in open sea. The Florida peninsula, jutting out into danger. The Texas coastline, low-lying and concrete-laden. Nearly a full month of back-to-back-to-back disasters.

This hurricane season - not yet even close to finished - has generated more destructive, land-falling storms than the past few years combined. Four of this year's monsters went on to become Category 4 or 5, and three of those made landfall in U.S. territory.

Hurricane Harvey seemed to spin up in an instant before hitting land on Aug. 26, only to come to rest for days over Southeast Texas and Southwest Louisiana. A mind-boggling 19 trillion gallons of rain fell in that storm, which triggered unprecedented flooding. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott estimates Harvey will cost the state up to $180 billion - more than epic Hurricane Katrina.

Hurricane Irma was one of the strongest ever recorded in the Atlantic Ocean. When Irma maintained 180 mph wind speeds for 37 hours, it set a record for most intense storm for such a long duration - anywhere on Earth. It made landfall Sept. 10, strafing

the Florida Keys before terrorizing both Florida coasts in vastly different ways. It knocked out power to millions of people, and some are still waiting for the lights to come back on.

Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico 10 days later as the strongest storm to hit the island since the 1928 San Felipe hurricane. It thrashed the U.S. territory with winds over 100 mph and more than 30 inches of rain. All of Puerto Rico lost power and was under flash flood warnings. The full extent of the damage, and the loss of life, might not be known for some time. It could take months to restore infrastructure.

All of this in just four weeks.

It spurs so many questions: Is this barrage random? Is it part of a natural cycle? Is it the result of climate change? Have we done this to ourselves?

Officials at the highest levels - who create, pass and sign the very policies that affect the environment - are bending over backward to dodge those questions. The political tension is palpable.

"To have any kind of focus on the cause and effect of the storm; versus helping people, or actually facing the effect of the storm, is misplaced," EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt told CNN as Hurricane Irma approached Florida.

When the question was posed to President Donald Trump on his way to visit hurricane-battered Florida, he replied: "We've had storms over the years that have been bigger than this."

To our struggling politicians, Pope Francis offered some advice: Climate change is happening, and you have a "moral responsibility" to do something about it.

"Those who deny this must go to the scientists and ask them," he said on a recent trip to Colombia. "They speak very clearly."

If they continue to deny climate change, he added, "history will judge those decisions."

This hurricane season is, indisputably, a nightmare. And it's indisputable that climate change is affecting our weather. The fingerprint of climate change is on every storm, it's in every raindrop and sunny day. It is a new, yet untested and ill-understood, factor in the way our planet works.

But there are additional elements that had to come together to create such a hellish year.

Hurricanes exist to cool the tropics. The vast majority of sunlight beats down in the 23 degrees north and south of the equator. Without something to disperse the energy toward the poles, Earth's climate would become unbalanced, quickly.

These planetary heat engines sprout from relatively weak clusters of thunderstorms - waves of low pressure from the coast of Africa - and fester in the warm waters of the Atlantic. They feed on tropical moisture and the sun's intense energy and, eventually, if they get large enough, will start to spin thanks to Earth's top-like motion.

Hurricanes can form in rapid succession and travel thousands of miles across the Atlantic, like rail cars on a train track or airplanes lining up for takeoff. Because they can gain steam, spinning themselves up into monstrosities, it's a trip that can end in the devastation of places like St. Croix, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and Southwest Louisiana. One after the other.

We saw this alignment in 2005, and we're seeing it again in 2017.

"This isn't a random coming together," said Gerry Bell, a hurricane climate specialist at NOAA. It's a specific combination of environmental factors.

The Atlantic Ocean is in a pattern that's particularly favorable for hurricanes. Every couple of decades, the pattern flips, but it's been positive since about 1995.

There have been some exceptionally big seasons in the past two decades. The extreme years tend to happen when the things that weaken hurricanes are not present - like El Nino and chaotic, hurricane-killing winds over the Atlantic Ocean. When those forces stand down, the favorable pattern goes to work.

Factor in some exceptionally warm ocean water and it becomes nearly impossible to avoid a strong season.

"We are seeing some of the hottest ocean temperatures in the planet in the western Caribbean Sea," said Michael Ventrice, a research meteorologist at The Weather Company. "This is like rocket fuel for developing tropical cyclones. A major concern for late-season development."

But hurricanes need to make landfall to generate the kind of disasters seen so far this year. Steering winds determine their path, though they aren't always as predictable as forecasters would like. Which Florida coast would receive Hurricane Irma's landfall - Miami or the Gulf - was a result of uncertainty in the wind forecast. It hit near Naples, Fla. and went north, but the massive storm covered the entire state, knocking out power to millions and causing flooding and damage from the Florida Keys to Jacksonville and beyond.

The Florida Peninsula is only about 100 miles wide - a tiny distance on a global scale. Hurricane Irma was going to turn north somewhere near South Florida, forecasters knew that. But a few miles of deviation meant some people were spared while others were inundated with storm surge and damaging winds.

In the same way, Puerto Rico avoided Irma's destructive inner core, only to be devastated by Hurricane Maria. These winds are fickle, but deadly.

If we zoom out to the big picture, though, the steering winds over the Atlantic Ocean have been very predictable this season. Unfortunately for all the humans who live there, the winds have been guiding hurricanes straight into the Caribbean islands and the southern United States.

It's a significant shift. For the past decade, those winds were coming from the west, pushing hurricanes away from land and out to sea, rendering them largely harmless.

"We were very fortunate, since 2005," Bell said. "But it was just a matter of time before they were going to start making landfall again."

This year is remarkably similar to 2005, when storm after storm exploded over the Caribbean and then made landfall. Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma are among the more memorable of that year.

The 2017 season is only half over. There will be more storms, and the wind isn't going to change any time soon. At least one forecast company thinks this heightened level of activity will continue.

"I would be surprised if October wasn't more active than normal, with one or more potential threats to the eastern Gulf Coast originating in the central or western Caribbean," Ryan Truchelut, the president of WeatherTiger, predicted.

More potential threats, more hurricanes. More lives lost and more destruction.

"A lot of people have already been through a lifetime of impacts, but there are going to be more storms, we know that," Bell warned. "They have to stay prepared."

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The Washington Post's Jason Samenow contributed to this report.

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MY VIEW

Keep methane rule intact

By Tom Mavilia Sep 23, 2017

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt: As a resident of New Mexico, I am extending to you a cheerful and hearty welcome to come and live and work in the middle of the Permian Basin or in the town of Farmington.

Since you do not think there is a problem with leaking methane and want to delay the implementation of the Leak Detection and Repair part of the Methane Rule, you should come here and experience it, firsthand. Breathe deeply!

Please, bring your family, I'm sure Cade and McKenna would love it, also. Oh, you probably do not think this is such a good idea for your family. Am I correct? But it is all right for other families to live with respiratory ailments. Being head of the EPA, your responsibility is to the people of the United States.

When you enter the doors of the First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow, do you think of all of the sick children and their parents having to live with pollution at their doorsteps? After all, being a Christian means that mankind is your business and responsibility, not making money for the fossil fuel industry.

Well, here are the facts. Children miss 500,000 days of school nationally each year because of smog resulting from oil and gas pollution. A study in Pennsylvania showed that there were greater percentages of preterm births among women who lived near natural gas plants and that their babies had lower birth weights. But you know this already.

When you attended your Cabinet hearing to be administrator of the EPA, you said, “I am blessed today to have my family in attendance with me.” What type of air do they breathe? Is your home next to a gas plant? Oh, and here we go again, you were “blessed.” Always thinking about God but never acting like a Christian.

Your record stands out loud and clear. You are an enemy of the people and have no right being head of any environmental organization. You have accepted more than $300,000 from the oil and gas industry over the years. When you became attorney general of Oklahoma, one of your first acts was to abolish the Oklahoma EPA. Why would you do such a thing? Money. Well, God will judge you and your actions. Don’t you need clean air? Clean water?

In closing, I would like to remind you that you are in bed with the devil, making deals to further your own greed and those of your buddies in the oil industry. I hope you sleep well tonight, while children are up coughing.

The one ray of hope is that it is no longer economically feasible to use oil and gas. New Mexico is already starting to turn things around in favor of renewable energy. Our New Mexico communities deserve the good-neighbor, common-sense, low-cost methane rules — the EPA should enforce the Obama-era Methane Rule.

Tom Mavilia is a retired teacher living in Arroyo Hondo and a volunteer trail crew member for the Carson National Forest.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE (HTTPS://FOODTANK.COM/NEWS/CATEGORY/SUSTAINABLE-AGRICULTURE/)

Farmers Claim Drift Problems Persist After Two States Banned Herbicide Dicamba

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Photo courtesy of Charles Ricardo via PixaBay.

Researchers from the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture found (https://www.uaex.edu/resources/news/august2017/08-10-2017-Ark-NEREC-Field-Day.aspx) in August that every formulation of the herbicide dicamba they tested—

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volatility, and it could move far away from the location it was originally sprayed. Some formulations remained volatile for up to 36 hours, even when proper application instructions were followed carefully.

Throughout the 2017 growing season, farmers in nearly a dozen states have claimed that these dicamba-based herbicides, newly approved for regular growing season use, were becoming airborne and causing severe puckering, wilting, and stunted growth in crops (http://modernfarmer.com/2017/07/dicamba-drift/) that had not been genetically engineered resistant to the herbicide.

Dicamba has been used for decades (http://modernfarmer.com/2017/07/dicamba-drift/) to kill weeds before crops were planted, which meant its volatility was less of a problem. But in 2015, with the intention for dicamba to become used during the re[illegible]anto released genetically modified dicamba-resistant se[illegible] by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). To ac[illegible]anto created a new spray, which was meant to be "s[illegible] that was not EPA-approved until late 2016. During that o[illegible] spray older formulations of dicamba on the new seeds, si[illegible]en resolved yet. However, some farmers sprayed anyway, which reportedly affected more than 200,000 acres of soybeans across several states last summer, according to *Modern Farmer* (http://modernfarmer.com/2016/08/dicamba/).

Te[illegible] areas: In October 2016, one farmer on the Missouri-Ar[illegible] allegedly shot and killed another farmer (http://modernfarmer.com/2016/11/pesticide-drift-leads-alleged-murder/) over the issue of dicamba drift.

This growing season was the first that both the seeds and new "stickier" spray were available. But in the Arkansas' researchers August 2017 report, they claim that after th[illegible]perly followed industry-provided labels on the newly released dicamba fo[illegible] remains an issue. Weed scientist Tom Barber said his laboratory tests (http://www.uaex.edu/media-resources/news/august2017/08-10-2017-Ark-NEREC-Field-Day.aspx) showed new products to be less volatile than old ones, but "when you [illegible] a field setting where volatility measurements are based on so[illegible] differences in volatility…are not as evident."

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In [illegible] the weed-killer effective immediately, and Arkansas imposed a 120-day ban effective the following week. To minimize the impact on farm[illegible]mba products, Missouri's ban was partially lifted (http://www.stltoday.com/business/local/tennessee-joins-states-taking-action-on-dicamba-missouri-imposes-restrictions/article_17321ec6-d8ea-5f4b-87f5-69b521bb87da.html) after less than a week in effect, though heavy restrictions were pl[illegible]a. States such as Iowa (http://www.iowafarmertoday.com/news/crop/iowa-tracks-dicamba-drift-incidents/article_2d078186-673c-11e7-a9ce-7b7b2c224a1c.html), Illinois (http://www.wunderground.com/news/dicamba-damage-estimate-tops-25-million-acres#stream/0), Kansas (http://kansaspublicradio.org/kpr-news/new-dicamba-damage-estimate-tops-25-million-acres-nationwide), Mississippi (http://[illegible]om/soybeans/target-dicamba-complaints-across-mid-so[illegible]omaha.com/money/use-of-dicamba-herbicide-draws-co[illegible]ers/article_69eb7b70-2628-5734-95ad-0[illegible]http://www.stltoday.com/business/local/tennessee-[illegible]amba-missouri-imposes-restrictions/article_17321ec6-[illegible]tml), and North Carolina ([illegible]s.com/soybeans/dicamba-drift-complaints-popping-[illegible]1&Issue=SEFP-01_20170706_SEFP-[illegible]cle_1&utm_rid=CPG02000003111919&utm_campaign=1849[illegible]mplaints related to dicamba. As of August 2017, [illegible] with an active dicamba ban.

Aetine Barnes, a spokeswoman for the Arkansas Department of Agriculture, says the dicamba bans have turned into a polarizing issue for farmers because many have invested tens of thousands of money and time in using dicamba on their crops, while other farmers are lodging complaints with the state over dicamba allegedly destroying th[illegible]-resistant crops.

"I[illegible]ation, because there are farmers that are both for and against the technology," Barnes said. "And it's something that some farmers are finding [illegible] are finding devastating. There's not a lot of gray area. So it's very [illegible]g our farming community, which is a bad thing for [illegible]

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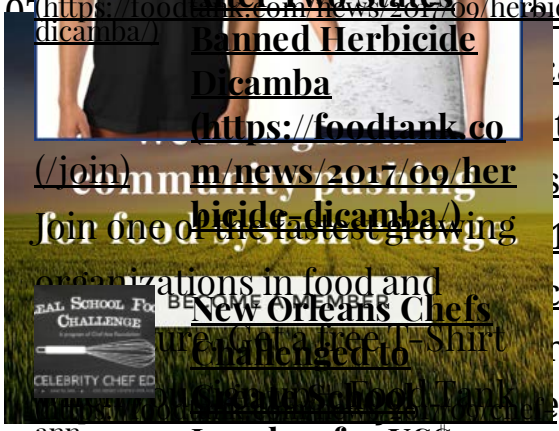
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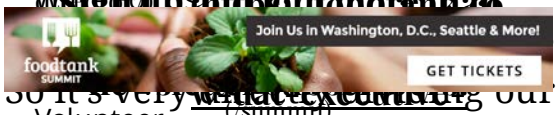

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As of September 12, 2017, Arkansas had received 969 complaints (http://www.aad.arkansas.gov/arkansas-dicamba-information-updates) allegedly related to di[illegible]t because the complaints are under investigation, damages cannot be [illegible]ted to dicamba until those investigations are complete. Missouri Department of Agriculture spokeswoman Sarah Alsager also referred to the 198 dicamba-related complaints the department had received as of July 19, 2017, as "a[illegible]" in [illegible].

In Arkansas, [illegible] a task force composed of farmers, scientists, and industry re[illegible] had been created to respond to dicamba complaints. They will be tasked with finding "some answers in terms of limiting when the product can be used, in terms of in-crop season; there may be larger buffer zones created, different types of no[illegible]," Barnes says. "So they're going to look at whether tighter re[illegible] some of the alleged damage being caused."

W[illegible] did enact tighter regulations, including a [illegible] when wind speeds exceed 10 mph, or applying [illegible]pm. The state also tightened licensing requirements [illegible]ing of dicamba applications.

[illegible] a complex issue that could be just as complicated to [illegible]

[illegible] it creates animosity between neighboring farmers," Barnes said. "So a solution will have to be reached to put us all on the same team again."

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Jared Kaufman (https://foodtank.com/news/author/jared-kaufman/)

Jared Kaufman is a research and writing intern for Food Tank. A Minneapolis native, he’s currently working toward degrees in magazine journalism and international studies at the University of Missouri. He’s especially interested in food and public health reporting, and has worked at a variety of magazines, newspapers, public relations and communication firms.

Jared Kaufman (https://twitter.com/jaredography) At any given moment, he’s probably eating, cooking, reading or writing about one of those things.

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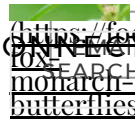

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After Harvey, 100+ debris dump sites pop up around town

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After Harvey, debris disposal sites have popped up around Houston. (KTRK)

By Miya Shay

Friday, September 22, 2017 07:00PM

HOUSTON, Texas (KTRK) -- Friends Howard Otis and Victor Hebert are taking a lot of pictures these days, but none of the images are pretty. Instead, they are pictures of debris truck after debris truck dropping off at the landfill across the street from their homes.

"I do remember it being a landfill," said Otis, who has lived on and off in the neighborhood near Tanner Road for years. "But I never remember it being like this."

The men are upset, they say, because the Hawthorn Landfill they live by has dramatically

things like that," said Hebert.

The reality is, the increased activity is just part of a statewide plan to speed up storm debris removal. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) has established more than 100 sites across the region where Harvey hit as Temporary Debris Management Sites. Some of these locations are already landfills; others are industrial areas that can accommodate large commercial trucks. All locations are managed by local authorities.

"What happens is that the trucks go to the debris management site, [the debris] gets reduced, sometimes ground and compacted, and we take that to a final location," said Josh Stuckey, the deputy incident commander for Harris County.

Stuckey is only responsible for Harris County debris sites. The City of Houston manages dozens of additional sites. Regardless, he assures nearby residents the uptick in activity won't be forever.

"These are temporary sites, please be patient. Obviously we are there to help their neighbors right now," he said. "This helps to get the debris off their neighbors' homes as fast as possible, so please be patient."

But for Heber, the finish line can't come soon enough.

"I don't want to live there with all that mold growing," he said.

When not used as a debris site, the Hawthorne Park Landfill is normally operated by Waste Management. The company says the landfill first opened in 1994.

Report a typo to the ABC13 staff

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Parts of Port Arthur under boil water notice due to water main break and low pressure

by Peter Eliopoulos

Boil Water Notice

The City of Port Arthur from Highway 73 to 4th Street between Highway 82 and Taft Ave is under an immediate boil water notice due to a water main break and subsequent loss of

pressure, according to a city spokeswoman.

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These areas include the west side of Port Arthur, Sabine Pass, Pleasure Island, and eastward to Highway 366.

The water main break happened near Savannah and 19th Street, but spokeswoman LaRisa Carpenter says it has since been fixed.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) says a significant loss of pressure could allow bacteria, viruses, and parasites grow.

Any water used for drinking, cooking, and ice making should be boiled and cooled prior to consumption, said LaRisa Carpenter.

The water should be brought to a vigorous boil for at least two minutes. Residents are also encouraged to buy bottled water for consumption.

If you experience nausea, cramps, diarrhea and/or headaches, officials urge residents to contact their doctor, especially those who are prone to infections.

For more information about the nature of the TCEQ violation, you can call DR. Jimmie Johnson or Donnie Stanton at 409-983-8550.

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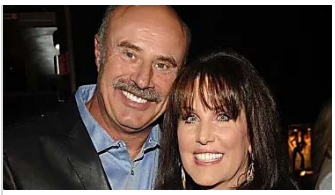

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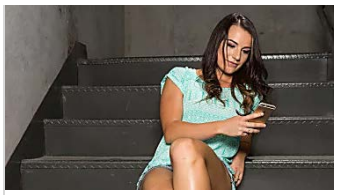

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TOP STORY

Forum to discuss proposed chemical plant in Killeen

Here's what we know, don't know

By Josh Sullivan and Julie A. Ferraro | Herald staff writers Sep 23, 2017

The groundbreaking was private for MGC Pure Chemicals America's proposed plant at the Killeen Business Park.

The public wasn't invited to the Aug. 30 event. Nor was media allowed. The Killeen Daily Herald reporter was told the media could ask questions at 11:15 a.m., after the groundbreaking, but nearly all participants were gone before 10:50 a.m. that day.

A sandbox used during the groundbreaking ceremony for the MGC Pure Chemicals America plant sits at the plant's site location in the 4500 block of Roy J. Smith Drive in Killeen, located in the Killeen Business Park, Thursday, Sept. 21, 2017.

Eric J. Shelton | Herald

Since then, residents also have questions and have been peppering their city representatives, who have their own questions for MGC and the Killeen Economic Development Corporation, which signed a performance agreement with the company Aug. 2.

To facilitate communication for their constituents, City Council members Shirley Fleming and Steve Harris have organized a forum with KEDC officials for Thursday, from 6 to 8 p.m., at the Killeen Community Center, 2201 E. Veterans Memorial Blvd.

MGC PLANS

The MGC Pure Chemicals America plant would produce superpure hydrogen peroxide, a cleaning chemical used in the semiconductor industry. This is used to produce several everyday items, such as camera lenses on phones and tablets.

An artist's rendition shows what the MGC Pure Chemicals America plant will look like upon completion.
Courtesy

Hydrogen peroxide, sulfuric acid and sodium hydroxide will be used and stored at the plant, said MGC spokesman Scott Hancock.

MGC's "practice is to keep limited amounts of chemicals on hand," Hancock said in an email Thursday. "In order not to cause damage to the surrounding area, our plant is designed to be in compliance with all legal requirements as well as utilizing best practices which have been cultivated during our long time in this business."

RESIDENTS' CONCERNS

Fleming and Harris have heard a barrage of concerns from constituents, many alarmed about an Arkema company plant fire in Crosby in the Houston area. At that plant, organic peroxides used to make paint, plastics and other products, caught fire and created fumes that first responders and residents blamed for sickening them. The chemical compounds caught fire when power was knocked out during Hurricane Harvey, cutting off the refrigeration used to store the chemicals, according to news reports.

"There's no guarantee that something like in Houston can't happen to us here," Fleming said.

Fire Burns at Crosby, Texas Chemical Plant

Smoke rises from a chemical plant in Crosby, near Houston, Texas, Friday, Sept. 1, 2017. Thick black smoke and towering orange flames shot up Friday from the flooded Houston-area chemical plant after two trailers of highly unstable compounds blew up a day earlier after losing refrigeration. Arkema says Harvey's floodwaters engulfed its backup generators and knocked out the refrigeration necessary to keep it's nine containers of organic peroxides from degrading and catching fire. (KTRK via AP)

TEL

Vivian Perry is one of those concerned about safety. She lives about a mile from the proposed plant.

"It's got so many questions, you know?" she said in a phone call Monday. "I used to live around Galveston, where they have the petroleum chemical companies; I'm familiar with things like that, and I'd hate to think about it going so close to a residential area and schools and stuff like that."

The River Oaks Apartments are less than a mile from the plant's expected site. Killeen High School is about two miles from the site.

MGC has one plant in the United States. The Mesa, Arizona, plant is 1.4 miles from a neighborhood, and 6.5 miles from the nearest school. Surrounding the plant is a Fujifilm Electronics plant, a Bridgestone Biorubber Process Research Center and a tire drop-off area, among other buildings.

"Plants of this nature often locate in industrial/business parks zoned for manufacturing as is the Killeen Business Park," said KEDC Executive Director John Crutchfield in an email Wednesday.

WHY KILLEEN?

Part of the reasons officials at MGC were drawn to Killeen was an incentive-laden performance agreement — potentially over $1.7 million — offered by the Killeen EDC.

The $540,144 piece of land, 12.4 acres, at the Killeen Business Park would be given to MGC at no cost, Crutchfield said, because it is already owned by KEDC. The company later would be given an option on additional land, up to 15.78 acres, worth $36,618 per acre. The dollar amounts on the land were listed in the agreement.

KEDC also will reimburse up to $486,000 of MGC's property tax payments.

KEDC would reimburse MGC for up to $500,000 in infrastructure improvements that could include rail spur development, roads and utility lines at the site.

The KEDC will fund a job creation grant of up to $224,000. That means MGC would get $8,000 for each full-time position.

KEDC will ask the city to waive an estimate $20,000 in permitting fees for MGC or it would reimburse MGC “should the city of Killeen fail to do so for any reason.”

KEDC would pay closing costs of up to $10,000 and the cost of subdividing the site.

MGC OBLIGATIONS

MGC would construct a 20,000-square-foot chemical manufacturing plant within 24 months of signing the performance agreement. MGC signed it July 26, and KEDC signed it Aug. 2.

MGC must make a capital investment of at least $23.1 million in real property, furniture, fixtures and equipment.

MGC must hire and retain 28 employees in five years. The first year the chemical plant will be in operation, it will be required to have three full-time positions, and each will pay an average salary of $66,000 a year. The agreement said that number will increase to 20 full-time positions with the same average salary in year two, and remain the same for year three. By the fifth year the plant is in operation, there should be 28 full-time positions. Each full-time position can be split into two, part-time positions that also meet the required 40-hour week and 52 weeks a year schedule.

WATER, OTHER NEEDS

Killeen city spokeswoman Hilary Shine said there is currently no water usage agreement between the city and MGC. However, Killeen officials have considered the company's estimated water needs and determined there is "adequate capacity in the current system to support those needs."

When the plant is fully operational, it is expected to use about 3 million gallons of water a month, according to MGC's Hancock. Waste that streams to the city's sewers will be mostly water, and will be treated for potential hydrogen before it is discharged.

During the construction permitting process, MGC is required to submit proof of compliance with state and federal emission standards. There will be no intentional emissions released from the plant, Hancock said.

There is currently no documentation on air or water permits, according to Crutchfield. The Environmental Protection Agency, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the city of Killeen are the agencies MGC will have to go through during the permitting process.

MGC has filed a notice of intent for stormwater discharges associated with construction activity with the TCEQ, according to Hancock.

The Killeen Business Park, where the the MGC Pure Chemicals America plant site is expected to be located, is seen Thursday, Sept. 21, 2017.

Eric J. Shelton | Herald

Permits are necessary for any toxic emissions, and MGC has not filed an application for those permits, according to Andrew Keese, media relations specialist for TCEQ.

"The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality does not have a pending permit application for MGC Pure Chemicals or Mitsubishi Gas Chemical Company in Killeen," Keese said as of Wednesday.

A lot depends on what MGC actually proposes, Keese added, as to which permits the chemical plant will need.

The potential for a rail spur is mentioned in the KEDC agreement with MGC. A call to the Texas Department of Transportation Rail Safety Program regarding regulation of transporting potentially hazardous chemicals received no response.

According to the TxDOT website, TxDOT rail safety investigators monitor compliance with state and federally mandated safety regulations in the areas of hazardous materials.

The TxDOT offers a "Hazardous Materials Toolkit" on its website. "The presence or suspected presence of hazardous material with the potential to influence a transportation project creates a multitude of problems affecting right-of-way acquisition, project development and construction," is how the website describes the purpose of the Toolkit.

MESA PLANT

In Mesa, Arizona, where MGC Pure Chemicals America has its headquarters, the local fire department deals with a number of industrial facilities using chemicals in that area, including MGC.

MGC Pure Chemicals America opened its first plant in Mesa, Arizona. The Killeen location will be its second.
Courtesy

John Locklin, deputy chief of fire prevention for the Mesa Fire and Medical Department could not provide any specific information on MGC's Mesa plant, as he had no access to that information.

"Generally, these places have a lot of OSHA requirements," Locklin said.

There are also state agencies, like the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, which have oversight of the plants.

Some of the requirements, according to Locklin, are handling, storage and backup systems and industrial sprinkler systems.

When a new plant is built, Locklin explained, it's traditional for the local hazardous material response team to do a walk-through, in order to familiarize themselves with the chemicals and layout of the building.

The plants also have an on-site emergency response team, to handle any small incidents, Locklin added. "They will have things happen, and will handle them and not tell us."

That is because the regulations allow for incidents involving what Locklin termed a "lower reportable quantity" to be dealt with in-house.

If something occurs at the plant that exceeds those quantities, the Mesa hazmat team responds.

KEDC FUNDING

35 percent of city funds and 65 percent of nontaxpayer funds.

In 2016: 2 cents for every 75 cents property tax income.

Killeen EDC's 2016 budget: $748,058 of revenues from the city's funding formula.

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Headlines

NMSU faculty, students use weather balloons to test ozone levels

Date: 09/22/2017
Writer: Kristie Garcia, 575-646-4211, kmgarcia@nmsu.edu

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Students at New Mexico State University are getting hands-on experience launching weather balloons to test ozone levels in the area.

New Mexico State Climatologist Dave DuBois from the NMSU College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, is the principal investigator on the project, which is part of a larger project initiated by the State of Texas.

New Mexico State University environmental science undergraduate student Octavio Nayares holds an ozonesonde - an instrument attached to a weather balloon that records and sends data back to the ground. NMSU faculty and students are launching the weather balloons as part of a project with the El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. (Photo by Dave DuBois)

Along with a combined 10 students from the University of Texas at El Paso and St. Edward's University in Austin, about six NMSU students are launching the weather balloons near El Paso, Texas, and Santa Teresa, New Mexico.

DuBois said the students have taken on quite of bit of responsibility.

"Just by doing the field work, there is a huge sense of teamwork and individual responsibility," DuBois said. "The students are also learning the science part of it. We're looking at the atmosphere and learning about how things change, and we're looking at ozone and why it's important. We're also measuring the weather on a day-to-day basis and observing it on the ground, all the way up to the stratosphere."

DuBois, who is an associate college professor in the NMSU Department of Plant and Environmental Sciences, said he expects to have launched 57 balloons by the end of September. The project began in May. The balloons are equipped with sensors that measure levels of ozone.

New Mexico State University environmental science undergraduate student Octavio Nayares (kneeling) and environmental science graduate student Zahra Ghodsi Zadeh (standing) prepare to launch a weather balloon with an ozone level sensor attached. NMSU faculty and students are launching the weather balloons as part of a project with the El Paso Metropolitan Planning

"Ozone is an air pollutant regulated by the United States Environmental Protection Agency, and it's the cause of many respiratory illnesses and deaths across the world," DuBois said. "We are working to understand the causes of ozone in El Paso. The sensors attached to the balloons send data back to us regarding the concentration of ozone while the balloon is in the air."

Organization and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. (Photo by Dave DuBois)

Each balloon ascends as high as 30 kilometers into the stratosphere before it pops and falls to the earth with a parachute.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality provides funding to the El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization, which contracted NMSU to conduct the ozone-measuring part of the project.

Michael DeAntonio, a college professor in the NMSU Department of Physics, is the field coordinator for the weather balloon launches. Along with DuBois and DeAntonio, NMSU students from the Department of Plant and Environmental Sciences, the New Mexico Climate Center, the Department of Physics and the Klipsch School of Electrical and Computer Engineering are working on the project. St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas, along with students from the University of Texas El Paso, are also partners in the project.

New Mexico State University Department of Plant and Environmental Sciences assistant professor Dave DuBois (center) is the principal investigator on a project that uses weather balloons to test ozone levels. NMSU Department of Physics college associate professor Michael DeAntonio (left) is the field coordinator. St. Edward's University natural sciences research assistant Mark Spychala (right) is also part of the project. (Photo by Gary Morris of St. Edwards University)

"The students are able to see the values change as the balloon rises," DuBois said. "The balloon goes up about five meters per second, and it takes about an hour to go about 30 kilometers – or about 80,000 feet, which is higher than an airplane – before it comes down. If the students are available, they can retrieve the sensor."

DuBois and his team plot the latitude and longitude of each sensor on Google Earth. If the location is accessible, the sensor is retrieved. When it lands in the desert or on farmland, it's more accessible. However, some have landed in Mexico, high up in the Organ Mountains and as far as Artesia, New Mexico. Even if the sensor is not retrieved, the necessary data is collected in real time.

In the event someone from the general public finds a sensor and the shredded balloon, DuBois has attached a phone number, as well as a note in English and Spanish that indicates the device is not dangerous.

"We have a Google phone number set up, so people can immediately call and it goes directly to my cell phone," he said. "I also tape a letter to the top that goes into detail about what we're doing."

Researchers are looking at many factors – including possible pollution from Mexico and Canada – that may contribute to air quality in the United States. Wildfires nearby and in the Pacific Northwest may factor in as well. The oil and gas industry, both on land and in the Gulf of Mexico, may play a part. Even distant locations, such San Antonio, Dallas, Houston, Tucson and Los Angeles may contribute. Because the balloons travel so high up, air masses from that far away may be tracked.

These factors are all just hypotheses at this point. Once all the data is complete, DuBois and his team will begin analyzing the results.

"The goal is to help El Paso make choices regarding efforts toward local emission controls, city planning, fuel for automobiles and transit," DuBois said. "There are dozens of options to change an area like El Paso. If they try to change the patterns of the pollution and change the timing, hopefully the ozone would be affected."

DuBois said this project gives the students a sense of accomplishment.

"We actually see the numbers come in, email the numbers out to get the data quality assured, and then we get it back the same day," he said. "The students also have to prepare the instruments, which takes a couple of hours. Then they actually see the balloon launch and come back down. They have a lot of ownership in the data now, and they've worked very hard."

The students will present their findings of this project at a conference in Austin in January.

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By MICHAEL BIESECKER
Sep. 21, 2017

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Classified information
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WASHINGTON (AP) — Employees at the Environmental Protection Agency are attending mandatory training sessions this week to reinforce their compliance with laws and rules against leaking classified or sensitive government information.

It is part of a broader Trump administration order for anti-leaks training at all executive branch agencies. The Associated Press obtained training materials from the hourlong class.

Government employees who hold security clearances undergo background checks and extensive training in safeguarding classified information. Relatively few EPA employees deal with classified files, but the new training also reinforces requirements to keep “Controlled Unclassified Information” from unauthorized disclosure.

The EPA occasionally creates, receives, handles and stores classified material because of its homeland security, emergency response and continuity missions. EPA employees also work closely with contractors and other federal agencies that more regularly handle classified information.

President Donald Trump has expressed anger repeated leaks of potentially embarrassing information to media organizations in recent months.

In a speech last month, Attorney General Jeff Sessions said those responsible for the "staggering number of leaks" coming out of the administration would be investigated and potentially prosecuted.

"We share the White House's concern with the unlawful leaks throughout the government," Justice Department spokesman Ian Prior said Wednesday.

EPA officials did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment Thursday.

A three-page fact sheet sent to EPA employees as part of the training warned that leaks of even unclassified information could have serious consequences to national security.

"Enemies of the United States are relentless in their pursuit of information which they can exploit to harm US interests," the document said.

The document recounted past circumstances where government secrets had been spilled either through espionage, computer hacks or leaks to reporters.

The examples included the 1980s spying case involving CIA counter-intelligence officer Aldrich Ames on behalf of the Soviets and a 1972 leak to columnist Jack Anderson about spying on members of the Soviet Politburo, which he disclosed in The Washington Post.

The sheet also cited the 2015 hack of computers at the Office of Personnel Management, a data breach that compromised the names, Social Security numbers, birthdates and home addresses and other sensitive personal information for 18 million people.

EPA staff was reminded of the whistleblower protections afforded to federal employees who expose wrongdoing. The training materials directed them to do so through proper channels for reporting fraud, waste and abuse, including the inspector general's hotline.

Associated Press reporters Seth Borenstein and Sadie Gurman in Washington, and Darlene Superville in New York contributed.

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

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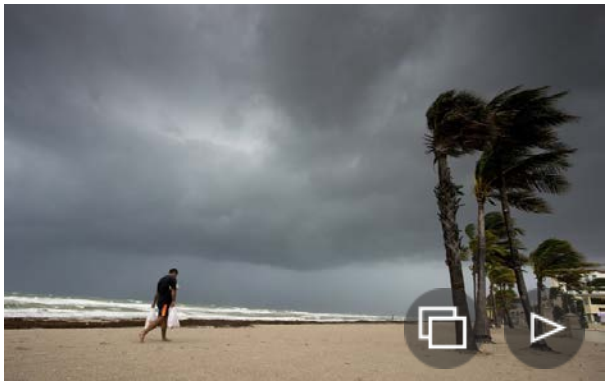

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