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Tuesday, September 12, 2017

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Hurricane Response:

1 U.S. Coast Guard, EPA cleaning up a dozen Texas chemical spills after Harvey, Reuters, 9/12/2017
https://af.reuters.com/article/africaTech/idAFL2N1LS1JQ
The U.S. Coast Guard and the Environmental Protection Agency are working with Texas state regulators to clean up oil and chemicals spilled from a dozen industrial facilities after flooding from Hurricane Harvey, authorities said. The spills came from oil refineries, fuel terminals and other businesses, but EPA spokeswoman Terri White said it was not possible to provide an estimate for the amounts spilled.

2 EPA opens inquiry into Arkema chemical plant explosion after Harvey flooding, Examiner, 9/11/2017
http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/epa-opens-inquiry-into-arkema-chemical-plant-explosion-after-harvey-flooding/article/2634057
The Environmental Protection Agency has opened an inquiry into whether the Arkema chemical plant in Crosby, Texas followed federal safety rules to protect against hazards, following explosions at the facility that resulted from Hurricane Harvey flooding.
EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt told the Washington Examiner on Monday he authorized a request for information to Arkema under Section 114 of the Clean Air Act about whether the company complied with a risk management plan filed with the federal government.

3 EPA/TCEQ: Updated status of systems affected by Harvey, 9/12/2017
http://www.gilmermirror.com/view/full_story/27477363/article-EPA-TCEQ--Updated-status-of-systems-affected-by-Harvey?instance=home_news_bullets
PA has 198 personnel supporting the response efforts for Hurricane Harvey and have established a Unified Command with other state and federal partners, and are in the field conducting work. Working together, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality continue to coordinate with local, state and federal officials to address the human health and environmental impacts of Hurricane Harvey and its aftermath, especially the water systems in the affected areas.

4 The Looming Superfund Nightmare, Atlantic, 9/11/2017
https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/09/the-looming-superfund-nightmare/539316/
The line between the acts of God and human acts has always been too blurry for our comfort. And the distinction between the two has perhaps never been less meaningful than it is now, with the Atlantic basin churning out an unprecedented slate of storms that have threatened areas across the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the southeastern coast of the United States.

5 The cruelest insult to Harvey and Irma's victims, Washington Post, 9/11/17
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-cruelest-insult-to-harvey-and-irmas-victims/2017/09/11/60e54caa-9715-11e7-82e4-f1076f6d6152_story.html?utm_term=.8dbddcf83fdd

When, if not now, is the time to talk about global warming and what to do about it? The answer from the Trump administration and the Republican Party, basically, is succinct in its willful ignorance: "How about never? Is never good for you?"

6 Column: Texas begins long march toward recovery from Hurricane Harvey, American Statesman, 9/11/17
http://www.statesman.com/news/local/column-texas-begins-long-march-toward-recovery-from-hurricane-harvey/amDpryLRJRmyQ9JZWVsy8J/
As contaminated waters receded and mountains of debris from flooded homes and ruined belongings grew last week, a picture of post-hurricane Texas developed and the process of weighing impacts to lives, property and infrastructure began. Gov. Greg Abbott delivered a series of announcements and proclamations related to catastrophic flooding and wind damage brought by Hurricane Harvey to more than 50 Gulf Coast and inland counties in late August and early September.

7 Texas Sprays Mosquitoes in 1.4 M Harvey-Ravaged Acres to Thwart West Nile and Zika Viruses, Breirtbart, 9/12/17
http://www.breitbart.com/texas/2017/09/12/texas-sprays-mosquitoes-in-1-4-m-harvey-ravaged-acres-to-thwart-west-nile-and-zika-viruses/
The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) reported they sprayed mosquitoes in more than 1.4 million acres ravaged by Hurricane Harvey. Officials plan to thwart the winged insects from breeding across multiple waterlogged counties, preventing a surge in their population and the diseases they carry, notably West Nile and Zika viruses.

8 Texas in dire need of relief, San Santonio Express, 9/12/2017
http://www.mysanantonio.com/opinion/editorials/article/Texas-in-dire-need-of-relief-12189572.php
The need for federal aid is urgent. Preliminary estimates for Hurricane Harvey's damages are in the ballpark of $190 billion, USA Today reports; that's the cost of Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy combined. And Hurricane Irma is sure to increase that need elsewhere. On Wednesday, the House of Representatives approved $7.9 billion in disaster relief funds. The Senate voted Thursday 80-17 on a package of about $15 billion in disaster aid, dispersed evenly between Hurricane Harvey victims and Community Block Grants for all 2017 disasters, including Irma. The House concurred and the president signed the bill on Friday.

Around the Region:

9 Report: San Antonio Behind on 'Green' Stormwater Infrastructure, Rivard Report, 9/12/2017
https://therivardreport.com/report-san-antonio-behind-on-green-stormwater-infrastructure/
Texas' five largest cities still have work to do when it comes to deploying citywide stormwater management, according to a scorecard released Monday by Environment Texas. Researchers with the environmental advocacy group graded cities according to 10-step regulation and education efforts surrounding green stormwater infrastructure (GSI), also known as low-impact development (LID). Austin is, unsurprisingly, ahead of other cities with 9 points (90%) compared to San Antonio's 6.5 (65%), followed by Fort Worth (60%), Houston (50%), and Dallas (40%).

10 Houston's Floodwaters Are Tainted With Toxins, Testing Shows, NY Times, 9/11/17
https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/11/health/houston-flood-contamination.html
Floodwaters in two Houston neighborhoods have been contaminated with bacteria and toxins that can make people sick, testing organized by The New York Times has found. Residents will need to take precautions to return safely to their homes, public health experts said. It is not clear how far the toxic waters have spread. But Fire Chief Samuel

Peña of Houston said over the weekend that there had been breaches at numerous waste treatment plants. The Environmental Protection Agency said on Monday that 40 of 1,219 such plants in the area were not working.

11 MONSANTO LEVELS CRITICISM AT ARKANSAS WEED SCIENTISTS, Ag.com, 9/11/17
http://www.agriculture.com/crops/soybeans/monsanto-levels-criticism-at-arkansas-weed-scientists
Monsanto has taken off the gloves in its effort to advance its dicamba-tolerant technology. Last week, the St. Louis-headquartered firm filed a petition with the Arkansas State Plant Board to halt what it calls an "unwarranted and misinformed ban" on dicamba in Arkansas.

12 TCEQ to host public meeting to discuss pending dairy farm near Panhandle, KFDA, 9/11/17
http://www.newschannel10.com/story/36338791/tceq-to-host-public-meeting-to-discuss-pending-dairy-farm-near-panhandle
The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) will host a public meeting this Tuesday to discuss opening a new dairy facility near Panhandle. The meeting will begin at 6:00 p.m. at the Panhandle High School Auditorium located at 106 West 11th.

13 TCEQ issues Ozone Action Day for Corpus Christi area, KRISTV, 9/11/17
http://www.kristv.com/story/36340054/tceq-issues-ozone-action-day-for-corpus-christi-area
The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality has issued an Ozone Action Day for the Corpus Christi area for tomorrow Tuesday, September 12, 2017. A reverse alert message was sent out around 4:30 pm Monday afternoon.

14 Water boil lifted in Aransas Pass, Caller Times, 9/11/17
http://www.caller.com/story/weather/hurricanes/2017/09/11/water-boil-lifted-aransas-pass/654845001/
The water boil order in Aransas Pass has been rescinded. The Aransas Pass Police Department posted Monday on its Facebook page the city's water no longer requires boiling prior to use.

15 Petrochemical giants dumped deadly carcinogens during Hurricane Harvey, WSWS, 9/12/17
https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2017/09/12/chem-s12.html
As Hurricane and Tropical Storm Harvey bore down on and flooded the northern Gulf Coast last month with an estimated 20 trillion gallons of rain, some 60 plants belonging to the world's petrochemical giants on the Texas coast began shutdown procedures. During this time they vented and dumped almost a million pounds of some of the most deadly chemical compounds on earth.

#AFRICATECH

SEPTEMBER 11, 2017 / 2:59 PM / UPDATED 15 HOURS AGO

UPDATE 2-U.S. Coast Guard, EPA cleaning up a dozen Texas chemical spills after Harvey

Reuters Staff

(Adds NuStar comment in paragraph 8)

By Emily Flitter

HOUSTON, Sept 11 (Reuters) - The U.S. Coast Guard and the Environmental Protection Agency are working with Texas state regulators to clean up oil and chemicals spilled from a dozen industrial facilities after flooding from Hurricane Harvey, authorities said.

The spills came from oil refineries, fuel terminals and other businesses, but EPA spokeswoman Terri White said it was not possible to provide an estimate for the amounts spilled.

“Initial reports were based on observation,” White said. “Some spills were already being cleaned up by the time EPA or other officials arrived to assess them and others had already migrated offsite.”

Refineries owned by Valero Energy Corp in Houston, Motiva Inc in Port Arthur, and Exxon Mobile Corp in Baytown, were among the facilities that had reported spills, according to White.

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Kinder Morgan spokeswoman Lexey Long said on Monday the company reported a spill of 500 barrels of gasoline on Aug. 27. Workers covered the spill with a foam blanket and set up a barrier to keep the public away.

“The spill has been fully remediated,” she said.

NuStar spokesman Chris Cho said a small amount of petroleum contact water spilled out of a storage tank into a containment area and was quickly cleaned up. “There were no injuries and no environmental impact,” he said.

Two wastewater treatment plants - Integrity Golden Triangle Marine Services of Port Arthur and San Jacinto River and Rail in Beaumont - also appeared on the list of spill response locations that EPA provided to Reuters.

A San Jacinto River and Rail spokesman said the plant had spilled a “foamy emulsion” when floodwaters overtopped the berms around its facility but its operators did not expect any health or environmental impacts.

Integrity Golden Triangle President Robert Goolsby said a wastewater pit at his plant overflowed into a concrete moat designed to contain such spills, and plant workers were already cleaning it up when state regulators and the Coast Guard arrived.

The liquid spills come in addition to more than a million pounds of toxic emissions above legal limits that spewed from industrial facilities following Harvey, according to reports from companies filed with the Texas Commission for Environmental Quality.

The EPA and other authorities had warned people affected by the flood that waters could contain bacteria and toxic chemicals, but have said little yet about the specific origins or quantities of substances.

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"I'm against the sword and the wall, what can I do?" said Carlos Caban, one of the residents, whose son had taken pictures of contaminated-looking floodwaters in nearby refinery site.

Several residents reported seeing a metallic sheen on water flowing near the plants during the heaviest flooding, posting videos to YouTube. (Reporting by Emily Flitter; Editing by Richard Valdmanis, Jonathan Oatis and Lisa Shumaker)

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WASHINGTON Examiner

Tuesday, September 12, 2017

EPA opens inquiry into Arkema chemical plant explosion after Harvey flooding

by Josh Siegel | Sep 11, 2017, 4:54 PM

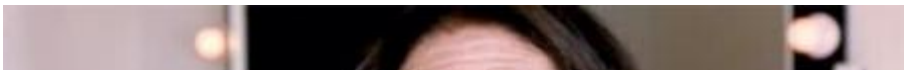
The Environmental Protection Agency has opened an inquiry into whether the Arkema chemical plant in Crosby, Texas followed federal safety rules to protect against hazards, following explosions at the facility that resulted from Hurricane Harvey flooding.

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt told the *Washington Examiner* on Monday he authorized a request for information to Arkema under Section 114 of the Clean Air Act about whether the company complied with a risk management plan filed with the federal government.

Depending on the information obtained by the EPA, the agency can issue administrative, civil or criminal action against Arkema, a multinational company based in France.

"I issued something called a 114 letter, which was a communication to Arkema to say you need to advise and inform me about your risk management plan [RMP] and whether you followed the specifics of the RMP and were you adequately prepared," Pruitt told the *Washington Examiner* in an interview. "There is some question about whether the RMP that was in place there was actually complied with."

The EPA, in a letter issued Sept. 7 and obtained by *Washington Examiner*, has ordered Arkema to respond within 10 days to questions about the handling of chemicals known as organic peroxides, which are combustible if not kept refrigerated. The EPA also wants to know the amount of chemical materials kept at the plant, and the measures taken in advance to guard against flooding and loss of electricity.



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Containers of the chemicals burst into flames on Aug. 31 after power outages caused by Hurricane Harvey shut off cooling systems that kept the chemicals stable.

A group of first responders sued Arkema last week, claiming they suffered "serious bodily injuries" from exposure to the toxic chemicals. The plaintiffs were manning the perimeter of a 1.5-mile evacuation zone imposed two days before the explosions, and the lawsuit alleged that after the blasts happened, no one from Arkema told the first responders.

In a statement Thursday, Arkema insisted its employees "did everything they could to protect the public" in a dangerous situation.

The U.S. Chemical Safety Board has initiated an investigation of the Arkema plant in Crosby to examine its risk management plans, which must be filed every four years with the EPA.

The New York Times reported last week Arkema identified in its risk management plan to the federal government that floods and hurricanes, as well as power failure and loss of cooling, were threats to its Crosby chemical plant.

But in its filing with the government, Arkema did not provide contingency plans to address those concerns, the Times said.

While Arkema faces scrutiny, the incident has also provoked criticism towards the Trump administration's efforts to roll back Obama-era regulations aimed at toughening safety requirements for companies that store large amounts of dangerous chemicals.

The EPA rule, which had not yet been implemented, would have required chemical plants to make public the types and quantities of chemicals they store. Pruitt delayed the rule taking effect until 2019 to allow the agency time to consider industry concerns.

Arkema lobbied against the rule, the Associated Press reported, and told the EPA in a May 2016 letter the proposal "will likely add significant new costs and burdens" and "could create a risk to our sites and to the communities surrounding them."

Pruitt on Monday defended his action to roll back the Obama rule, and said too much transparency can be dangerous.

"Risk management plans are important tools, and I am very much in favor of risk management plans," Pruitt told the *Washington Examiner*. "The concern about some of those risk management plans is the data in those RMPs are actually intelligence or information our adversaries — terrorists — can use to attack soft targets across this country. So we [have to] make sure those RMPs are done the right way to assure we are not equipping our adversaries."

Despite those concerns, Pruitt said Arkema should have to prove it followed the rules on hand, or suffer consequences if it did not.

"Citizens in communities deserve to know what is going on with that chemical plant," Pruitt said. "It's important for us to follow-up and make sure that it [the risk management plan] was complied with, and there's accountability there. What that means at this point has yet to be determined because we don't know all the information yet."

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EPA/TCEQ: Updated status of systems affected by Harvey

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EPA/ TCEQ: Updated status of systems affected by Harvey

EPA has 198 personnel supporting the response efforts for Hurricane Harvey and have established a Unified Command with other state and federal partners, and are in the field conducting work. Working together, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality continue to coordinate with local, state and federal officials to address the human health and environmental impacts of Hurricane Harvey and its aftermath, especially the water systems in the affected areas. The TCEQ has approximately 500 people assisting in response to this natural disaster

As part of this coordination, a Unified Command was established between the EPA, the TCEQ, the General Land Office, and the U.S. Coast Guard to oversee all emergency response efforts. This Unified Command is supported by three operational branches in Corpus Christi, Houston, and Port Arthur. In addition to the EPA, the TCEQ, the GLO, and the USCG, multiple agencies and groups are supporting each of the operational branches, including the Texas National Guard, 6th Civil Support Team; the Arkansas National Guard, 61st Civil Support Team; the Oklahoma Task Force 1; and the Texas State Guard Engineering Group. Branch personnel are working to continuously monitor water and wastewater systems, as well as assess spills or discharges as a result of the storm.

As of Monday, Sept. 11, the following information is available:

Drinking Water: To date, about 2,238 drinking water systems have been affected by Harvey. Of those: 2,014 systems are fully operational, 136 have boil-water notices, and 35 are shut down. Both the EPA and the TCEQ are contacting remaining systems to gather updated information of their status. Assistance teams are in the field working directly with system operators to expedite getting systems back to operational status.

Wastewater and Sewage: The TCEQ has made contact with 1,219 wastewater treatment plants in the 58 counties within the Governor's Disaster Declaration. Of those, 35 are inoperable in the affected counties. The agencies are aware that releases of wastewater from sanitary sewers are occurring as a result of the historic flooding and are actively working to monitor facilities that have reported spills. Additionally, the agencies are conducting outreach and providing technical guidance to all other wastewater facilities in flood-impacted areas. Assistance teams will continue to be deployed to work directly with system operators to expedite getting systems back to operational status.

Flood Water: Water quality sampling will be focused on industrial facilities and hazardous waste sites. Floodwaters contain many hazards, including bacteria and other contaminants. Precautions should be taken by anyone involved in cleanup activities or any others who may be exposed to flood waters. These precautions include heeding all warnings from local and state authorities regarding safety advisories. In addition to the drowning hazards of wading, swimming, or driving in swift floodwaters, these waters can carry large objects that are not always readily visible that can cause injuries to those in

the water. Other potential hazards include downed power lines and possible injuries inflicted by animals displaced by the floodwaters.

Critical Water Infrastructure: The TCEQ has made contact with the owners of the 340 dams in the impacted areas. There are 15 dams that have reported some type of damage. There have been no reports of downstream damage or loss of life. The TCEQ will be meeting with affected dam owners in the next week.

Additional EPA/TCEQ updates include:

Superfund Sites: The EPA and the TCEQ continue to get updates about the status of specific sites from the parties responsible for ongoing cleanup of the sites. The TCEQ has completed the assessment of all 17 state Superfund sites in the affected area. There were no major issues noted. The TCEQ will continue to monitor sites to ensure no further action is needed in regards to the storm.

The EPA completed site assessments at all 43 Superfund sites affected by the storm. Of these sites, two (San Jacinto and U.S. Oil Recovery) require additional assessment efforts. Work continues at both the San Jacinto Waste Pits and U.S. Oil Recovery Superfund sites. The EPA has directed potential responsible parties or has independently started collecting samples at the 43 Superfund sites to further confirm any impacts from the storm. Sampling efforts of all Texas sites are expected to be completed this week with sample results available soon. Sampling of Louisiana sites will begin within the next two weeks.

Debris Management: The TCEQ has approved 118 Temporary Debris Management Sites in areas under the Federal or State Disaster Declaration designations. TCEQ regional offices and local authorities are actively overseeing the siting and implementation of debris and waste management plans in the affected area. View a map of all Temporary Debris Management Sites Exit the TCEQ.

Reconnaissance/Orphan Containers: The TCEQ continues to lead in monitoring facilities that have reported spills. Orphan containers, which include drums and tanks, found floating in or washed up near waterways continue to be gathered, sorted and grouped by type, prior to shipping them off for safe, proper treatment and disposal. Reconnaissance and assessment of facilities and vessels are being conducted to identify any leaks or spills and responded to accordingly. The Unified Command is also working to ensure the disposal of oil and hazardous materials is conducted properly.

Air Quality Monitoring: One of the many preparations for Hurricane Harvey included the EPA, the TCEQ, and other monitoring entities temporarily shutting down several air monitoring stations from the greater Houston, Corpus Christi, and Beaumont areas to protect valuable equipment from storm damage. Since then, state and local authorities have been working to get the systems up and running again as soon as possible. As of Monday, Sept. 11, the TCEQ's air monitoring network is operational 100 percent in Corpus Christi, 96 percent in Houston, and 86 percent in Beaumont. The network is expected to be fully operational again by the end of this week. Of the available air monitoring data collected from Aug. 24 through Sept. 10, all measured concentrations were well below levels of health concern. The EPA is conducting air monitoring using the TAGA mobile air monitoring bus in southeast Houston neighborhoods nearest industrial sources and data reports are available online at www.epa.gov/hurricane-harvey Exit the TCEQ.

Refineries/Fuel Waivers: In addition to gasoline waivers for 38 states and D.C., and diesel waivers for Texas, the EPA signed three No Action Assurance letters on Sept. 1 to help address fuel shortages. NAA will help expedite the distribution of existing gasoline supplies to both Texas and Louisiana, while the refineries work to re-start and resume normal operations. The diesel waivers and NAA letters are effective until Sept. 15 and should allow for the distribution of fuel to consumers in Texas. The EPA recently reissued the gasoline waivers for the maximum time allowed under the Clean Air Act through Sept. 26, and the TCEQ will work with the EPA to extend these waivers through Oct. 1. The TCEQ is currently evaluating whether the NAA letters and diesel waivers need to be reissued and has discussed possible reissuance with the EPA.

Arkema Plant Fire Update: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has completed its response support to the Crosby Volunteer Fire Department and the Harris County Fire Marshal's Office for the catastrophic event at Arkema. A copy of EPA press release and summary information is available at https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/arkema-update.

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The Looming Superfund Nightmare

As unprecedented hurricanes assault coastal U.S. communities, residents and experts fear the storms could unleash contamination the EPA has tried to keep at bay.

Justin Sullivan / Getty Images

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7:00 AM ET | HEALTH

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The line between the acts of God and human acts has always been too blurry for our comfort. And the distinction between the two has perhaps never been less meaningful than it is now, with the Atlantic basin churning out an unprecedented slate of storms that have threatened areas across the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the southeastern coast of the United States.

Yes, hurricanes are by definition natural disasters, spawned by the primordial forces of sun, water, air, and earth. But even as science is ever more certain that human activity has intensified hurricanes themselves, there are a slew of other anthropogenic problems that have intensified their horrific effects. Perhaps the greatest is the curse of chemical pollutants—artificial toxic substances absorbed and unleashed by Mother Nature.

The storm-fueled spread of contamination is already an acute concern among those living in the Houston area, which was battered late last month by Hurricane Harvey. The region has several hazardous-waste sites currently managed by the federal and state governments. Among them are 13 Superfund sites. These are industry-contaminated, abandoned areas that the Environmental Protection Agency has slated for clean-up, or where it has already helped launch massive construction projects to contain the chemicals. Or, at least, that's the goal.

Parts of Greater Houston saw 40 inches or more of total rainfall as Harvey stalled over the city. The flooding caused explosions at the Arkema chemical plant in Crosby, Texas, which has already led to a lawsuit alleging that Arkema's negligence exposed first responders to poisonous fumes. And pollutants have washed up in neighborhoods. Along the San Jacinto River, just across from one hazardous waste site, poisonous globules of mercury appeared on the banks days after the storm.

According to Yvette Arellano, a research fellow with Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services, or TEJAS, residents have been more concerned about the chemicals from local industrial wastelands than they are about the floodwaters still lingering in many parts of the area. "I think we're all exhausted," said Arellano, who is local herself. "A lot of people want a lot of answers."

Word that no major leaks have been reported may be little comfort to local communities.

Of particular concern to residents is a fenced-off Superfund site in Houston's Fifth Ward community—where an old metal-casting foundry and chemical-recycling

facility leached lead into the ground—and various sites along the San Jacinto. Residents smelled creosote, a derivative of tar, during the flood and saw sheens in pooling water that they feared might have come from petrochemical spills.

Their concerns were captured in a recent story from the Associated Press. Reporters Michael Biesecker and Jason Dearen described how in the immediate aftermath of Harvey, one particular concern was the San Jacinto River Waste Pits site, an ongoing remediation of an old paper-mill waste dump that had once leaked potentially carcinogenic dioxins into the surrounding soil and groundwater. The site had been covered by an "armored cap" of a waterproof lining covered with rocks to keep contaminants from further leaking in the case of a flood.

Biesecker and Dearen also reported that EPA officials had not yet visited the 13 Harvey-affected Superfund sites near Houston. The agency claimed the locations had "not been accessible by response personnel," though Dearen was able to reach most of them by boat and car. The EPA criticized the story—and Biesecker personally—after it was published on September 3, though the agency did not dispute specific facts in the team's reporting. On September 6, the EPA and its state partner, the Texas Commission for Environmental Quality, announced that TCEQ had completed initial inspections of most sites.

David Gray, the acting deputy regional administrator for the EPA's Region 6 office, which includes Texas, told me evaluations have continued since then. "EPA completed site assessments at all 43 Superfund sites affected by the storm," Gray wrote in an email. "Of these sites, two (San Jacinto and U.S. Oil Recovery) require additional assessment efforts."

The "armor" part of the armored cap covering the San Jacinto waste pits—the layer of rocks—had been at least partially displaced during the flood, although no damage to the liner itself has been reported so far. At the U.S. Oil recovery site in Pasadena, where the EPA has attempted to keep used oil products from entering waterways, crews were working to vacuum flood waters from the facilities, Gray

said, adding that "no sheen or odor was observed in the overflowing water." He anticipated that further assessment at both sites would take several days.

Still, word that no major leaks have been reported may be little comfort to local communities, which already have to plan for low-level contamination incidents and the risk of further contamination thanks to regular (albeit more mundane) flooding in the area. Many of those communities tend to fall into TEAS's "environmental justice" category; marginalized by race, income, or both, they face the greatest dangers from contamination and the longest road to recovery.

Superfund sites aren't the only polluted zones affected by Harvey. There are several Resource Conservation and Recovery Act-managed areas—active dumping or waste sites being managed by the EPA—around Houston, too. But Superfund sites contain some of the worst hazards—old plants and dumps that operated before the EPA's rules were in place—the mitigation of which requires federal oversight and funding. Environmentalists told me after Harvey that the agency may not be up to the task, and that its readiness is in decline.

The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 established the EPA's Superfund program to remediate or recover contaminated sites that couldn't continue to be used. Though federal funding kicks in if offending companies won't foot the bill, it hasn't always been adequate.

Originally, environmental taxes on chemical manufacturers and other companies supported the government's share. But since the taxes were repealed in 2001, appropriations from the federal general fund have paid for the program. That money dwindled in the ensuing years, since Congress always appropriated less than the expected revenue from the old taxes, and the number of Superfund cleanups plummeted. Environmental activists and lawyers fear the EPA's capabilities to monitor and manage Superfund sites are diminishing, too. And one key component of that monitoring and management is disaster response.

Harvey isn't the first hurricane to threaten people with contamination and test the EPA's mettle.

"I see a severe problem with the lack of funding for EPA, because it renders them unable to respond to a disaster like this," said Lisa Evans, a senior counsel at the environmental-law organization Earthjustice. "One has to budget for these inevitable contingencies, otherwise you can leave those communities high and dry."

Harvey isn't the first hurricane to threaten people with contamination and test the EPA's mettle. Perhaps the worst-case scenario for Houston right now is what happened in the Gulf region after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. According to Erik Olson, the director of the health program at the Natural Resources Defense Council, flooding from Katrina, and from Hurricane Rita just weeks later, clearly disrupted hazardous-waste sites at dozens of Superfund and RCRA sites.

"The problem is that you could see a lot of waste that was supposedly 'under control' getting mobilized into waterways and spreading throughout the community," Olson said. Working with the NRDC and other environmental groups, local residents did their own water testing and "found widespread contamination around Superfund and RCRA sites."

That contamination was eventually confirmed through numerous assessments by the EPA and outside researchers. A 2009 study from Mary Fox, Ramya Chari, Beth Resnick, and Thomas Burke at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health found that "multiple persistent contaminants were found together in the soils and sediments sampled in Orleans Parish," and that EPA studies of individual pollutants in soil and water understated potential health effects of cocktails of multiple chemicals at once. Subsequent studies of the Agriculture Street Landfill Superfund site found that sediments deposited around the area by Katrina and Rita contained high levels of benzo[a]pyrene, a carcinogen.

Seven years after Katrina, another storm demonstrated similar environmental risks. Hurricane Sandy flooded a region with numerous Superfund sites and ongoing constructions of Superfund containment structures: New Jersey and the New York City metropolitan area have one of the densest concentrations of Superfund sites in the country. "There's lots of local contamination that happens in a major storm," said Burke, who once worked at the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the EPA. "I think in retrospect, the New York and New Jersey metropolitan area was very lucky that in many sites the caps held, and the contamination was luckily not major." Still, the extent of the contamination might have been underreported. As *Politico* reported in late 2012, minimal testing and inspection by EPA officials meant the agency often didn't even test the water or soil at some flooded locations.

It's not clear that today's EPA is any more equipped to handle flood disasters than earlier iterations were. One of the few concrete policies proposed by current EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt was an overhaul of the Superfund program, so that "the EPA's land- and water-cleanup efforts will be restored to their rightful place at the center of the agency's core mission." To that end, the EPA has commissioned a task force for revitalizing the program and is following their recommendations.

But environmentalist critics of Pruitt's EPA argue that his plan, which will focus Superfund resources on sites "with the most reuse potential," will merely end up channeling federal and private money into a small number of projects that can be salvaged for potential industrial or commercial use. Pruitt has also championed President Donald Trump's proposed budget cuts to the agency—which would slash the Superfund by about one-third—as a way to "to reduce redundancies and inefficiencies." While those cuts likely won't be implemented in full, and even Republicans in Congress have balked at Trump's proposed cuts, Superfund's history would suggest that funding reductions lead to fewer cleanups—and cause existing sites to languish and become more and more vulnerable to disasters.

"So far no sites have risen to this level [of an immediate threat] that we are aware of."

People living near Superfund sites have been afraid of that exact thing. In a bit of tragic foreshadowing, residents of the Fifth Ward, a historically black and low-income sector of Houston, held meetings in July expressing unease with the EPA budget cuts. In particular, they were concerned about any potential lapse in protection from the lead-poisoned waste in the middle of their neighborhood, where the Many Diversified Interests Superfund site covers an old industrial facility.

Officials at EPA headquarters haven't responded to requests for comment, but the agency has pushed back against criticisms of their work during and after Harvey. On September 8, the EPA released the results of spectroscopic analysis of neighborhoods near the Valero refinery—which the agency monitors, but isn't a Superfund site—that showed "no levels of targeted toxic chemicals were detected above the Texas TCEQ Air Monitoring Comparison Values." Additionally, the EPA has outlined its plans to respond to any disruption of Superfund sites by Hurricane Irma, taking steps that "are consistent with how EPA has historically prepared Superfund sites for natural disasters, such as hurricanes." On Saturday, EPA spokeswoman Liz Bowman told the AP's Biesecker and Dearen that in the case of Irma, "so far no sites have risen to this level [of an immediate threat] that we are aware of."

Still, the storm, which began battering the Florida Keys Sunday morning, could prove a challenge, both to the EPA's response and to its reputation. On Thursday, Irma skirted Puerto Rico at category-five strength, whipping up waves that battered the coast of the main island, and hit outlying areas even harder. One of them was Vieques, a tiny island where for years residents have been battling health issues allegedly linked to a Superfund site. It contains depleted uranium and other heavy metals from old Navy munitions.

Natasha Bannan, a counsel with LatinoJustice who has worked in Vieques, said that while the island's immediate concern is surviving the storm, there's always a level of concern about the contamination spreading. "When you are in a toxic

environment, of course there's risks," Bannan said. "I'm not a scientist, but when you have a hurricane come through that's moving soil and water, of course there are going to be risks."

Irma's devastation won't end in the Caribbean. Over the next few days, its projected path through southern Florida would take it over dozens of hazardous-waste sites, including several where residents have long faced higher-than-average incidences of cancer.

And Irma won't be the last. Hurricane season is far from over, and Harvey and Irma will make large swathes of the country even more vulnerable to future storms. In all, with what seems to be an especially volatile hurricane season, multiple communities living near Superfund and RCRA sites in coastal areas will live in trepidation.

The EPA could never erase that trepidation in its entirety, even if the Superfund program were again funded by polluter taxes and the agency put full remediation plans and caps on every one. The forces of nature are unpredictable, and truly catastrophic storms can destroy even well-laid protections. But currently, as sites have languished with no plan or budget to fix them, and as protections on remediated sites age, and as the agency has historically downplayed some concerns of environmental-justice communities, residents near contaminated areas have been placed in limbo.

Even in places where caps on contaminated sites hold, risk remains. Most sites aren't fully remediated, several have no firm timeline for remediation, and the caps in place degrade with age, wear, and exposure to floods. And all of this is happening as activists say the EPA has lost its ability to administer the program and cope with disasters. "The large majority of Superfund sites contain the nightmare in place," Burke told me. But for how long?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Opinions

The cruelest insult to Harvey and Irma's victims

By Eugene Robinson Opinion writer September 11 at 7:30 PM

When, if not now, is the time to talk about global warming and what to do about it? The answer from the Trump administration and the Republican Party, basically, is succinct in its willful ignorance: "How about never? Is never good for you?"

No rational U.S. administration would look at the devastation from Hurricanes Harvey and Irma and seek to deny climate change. At present, however, there is no rational U.S. administration.

We have instead a president and an Environmental Protection Agency chief who refuse to acknowledge the obvious. Thoughts and prayers are welcome at times such as these, but they are insincere if not supplemented by analysis and action. Future megastorms will likely be worse, scientists say; the question for policymakers is to what degree.

According to EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, for scientists to "use time and effort to address" the cause of these massive, anomalous storms would be "very, very insensitive to [the] people in Florida." If I search the archives, I can come up with a few statements from Trump administration officials that are more irresponsible, but not many.

Why did Harvey dump unprecedented, almost biblical amounts of rainfall on Houston and its environs? Why did Irma spend longer as a Category 5 storm than any other Atlantic hurricane on record? Why, for the first time anyone knows of, did we have two Atlantic Category 4 storms make U.S. landfall in the same season? Why did we have two major hurricanes (Irma and Jose) and a third, somewhat lesser storm (Katia) churning at the same time?

As deniers frequently point out, no individual weather event can be definitively blamed on climate change. But the World Meteorological Organization released a statement concluding that "the rainfall rates associated with Harvey were likely made more intense by anthropogenic climate change." And regarding Irma, the WMO cited models showing that "hurricanes in a warmer climate are likely to become more intense."

There are established linkages between a storm's severity and factors such as sea levels, ocean temperatures and the position of prevailing currents such as the jet stream. Global warming has altered all of those parameters.

This is precisely the moment when scientists at the EPA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the National Weather Service, NASA and other agencies ought to be laser-focused on climate change. They should study the characteristics and impacts of this season's hurricanes to better understand what changes global warming has wrought thus far. And I'm confident they will do so — unless their work is hampered by political hacks.

Climate change never should have become a partisan issue in the first place. There is no red or blue spin on the fact that humans have burned enough fossil fuels since the Industrial Revolution to increase the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere by more than 40 percent; or that carbon dioxide traps heat; or that global land and ocean temperatures have shot up; or that Arctic ice is melting; or that sea levels are rising. These things are directly measurable and true.

Global warming cuts no slack for political affiliation — as Republican Govs. Greg Abbott of Texas and Rick Scott of Florida now should humbly acknowledge.

But because the GOP cynically positions itself as anti-science, times of trial can never be the right time to talk about climate change. Nor can times when there are no storms. We're supposed to wait for the next Harvey, Irma or Katrina — then zip our lips out of "respect" for the victims.

President Trump may sincerely disbelieve the scientific consensus or he may be just pretending — it's hard to tell. He continues to peddle his fantasy of "beautiful, clean coal" and his empty promise to bring back the industry. Maybe he really doesn't grasp that coal was crushed not by government regulation but by the advent of cheap, plentiful natural gas due to fracking.

And maybe Trump doesn't get the fact that the rest of the world recognizes both the environmental and the economic benefits of clean-energy technologies. It is likely, I believe, that at some point there will be world-changing breakthroughs in solar power, battery capacity and nuclear fusion. I hope these advances are made in the United States; I fear they will be made in China, Japan or Germany.

The Trump administration should at least be insisting that coastal communities in Texas and Florida be rebuilt taking climate change into account. Sea- level rise is an unquestioned fact; the cruelest insult to those now suffering would be to pretend it is not.

Read more from Eugene Robinson's archive, follow him on Twitter or subscribe to his updates on Facebook. You can also join him Tuesdays at 1 p.m. for a live Q&A.

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Eugene Robinson writes a twice-a-week column on politics and culture, contributes to the PostPartisan blog, and hosts a weekly online chat with readers. In a three-decade career at The Post, Robinson has been city hall reporter, city editor, foreign correspondent in Buenos Aires and London, foreign editor, and assistant managing editor in charge of the paper's Style section. Follow @Eugene_Robinson

Column: Texas begins long march toward recovery from Hurricane Harvey

0

Ed Sterling - Contributing writer
12:30 p.m Monday, Sept. 11, 2017 Filed in Local News

VIEW CAPTION

As contaminated waters receded and mountains of debris from flooded homes and ruined belongings grew last week, a picture of post-hurricane Texas developed and the process of weighing impacts to lives, property and infrastructure began.

Gov. Greg Abbott delivered a series of announcements and proclamations related to catastrophic flooding and wind damage brought by Hurricane Harvey to more than 50 Gulf Coast and inland counties in late August and early September.

On Sept. 7, Abbott thanked Congress for passing a $15.3 billion hurricane relief package and called the bipartisan action “an encouraging sign.”

On Sept. 9, Abbott wrote to EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, expressing support for a request by the Texas Water Development Board to streamline federal funding for flood and water infrastructure projects related to Hurricane Harvey. The board administers EPA’s state revolving funds, which will be used to repair and rebuild water, wastewater and storm water systems in communities affected by Harvey.

The Ne…

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1:30 / 1:30

Also on Sept. 9, Abbott and Texas A&M University System Chancellor John Sharp, who heads the newly created Governor's Commission to Rebuild Texas, met with Beaumont officials along with leaders of many state agencies. It was the first stop in a three-city, five-day trip to discuss the devastation caused by Hurricane Harvey and get input on how the commission can assist in the rebuilding and recovery effort.

Mosquito spraying begins

The Texas Department of State Health Services on Sept. 6 announced the launch of FEMA-assisted mosquito control measures over the Hurricane Harvey-stricken counties of Refugio and Bee.

Areas of standing water may increase the number of mosquitoes capable of spreading diseases such as the West Nile and Zika viruses, the DSHS said.

Paxton applauds ruling

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton praised a decision Sept. 5 by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit to uphold the state's voter identification law that was blocked last month by a Corpus Christi federal district court.

A three-judge panel of the Fifth Circuit voted 2-1 to overturn an injunction granted by the lower court. The ruling, Paxton said, means that an interim court remedy is in place for 2017, preserving the requirement of an ID while allowing those without an accepted ID to vote by signing a sworn declaration stating that they have a reasonable impediment to obtaining one.

Furthermore, Senate Bill 5, a law passed by the Texas Legislature this year amending the voter ID law to comply with a prior 5th Circuit ruling, takes effect in 2018, Paxton said. Paxton echoed the U.S. Department of Justice, saying the new law "eradicates any discriminatory effect or intent" and expands voter identification options.

DACA decision pleases AG

Attorney General Paxton on Sept. 5 applauded President Donald Trump's decision to phase out within the next six months the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program created by President Barack Obama in 2012.

DACA granted lawful presence and work permits to nearly 800,000 people who were brought to the U.S. as children by foreign nationals. President Trump left it to Congress to pass a law by March 5, 2018, that would allow affected individuals to continue residing in the U.S.

Hegar reports on taxes

Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar last week released the total of state revenues collected during the fiscal year that began Sept. 1, 2016, and ended Aug. 31, 2017. Hegar also posted a state revenue report for the month of August.

Sales tax revenue for the year was $28.9 billion, 0.3 percent ahead of the $28.8 billion projected in the January biennial revenue estimate, and general revenue-related revenue was $52.3 billion, or 1.2 percent ahead of the projection of $51.7 billion. State sales tax revenue for the month of August totaled $2.48 billion, 0.9 percent less than in August 2016, he said.

Also, Hegar reported that Texas' "all funds" tax collections for fiscal year 2017 came to $49.6 billion, or 0.2 percent less than his $49.7 billion projection, and all funds revenue totaled $111.2 billion, or 1.4 percent less than his $112.8 billion projection.

Revenue distribution set

Comptroller Hegar on Sept. 7 announced his office would send cities, counties, transit systems and special purpose taxing districts $668.3 million in local sales tax allocations for September, an amount 6.2 percent more than the Office of the Comptroller distributed in September 2016.

Allocations are based on sales made in July by businesses that report tax monthly.

Ed Sterling is director of Member Services for the Texas Press Association.

VIEW COMMENTS 0

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UPDATE NOW

Air Force Photo/MSgt. Bob Barko, Jr.

by MERRILL HOPE | 12 Sep 2017 Austin, TX 11

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) reported they sprayed mosquitoes in more than 1.4 million acres ravaged by Hurricane Harvey. Officials plan to thwart the winged insects from breeding across multiple waterlogged counties, preventing a surge in their population and the diseases they carry, notably West Nile and Zika viruses.

DSHS officials indicated they began these mosquito control efforts throughout the flooded regions along the upper Texas coast and Coastal Bend areas, in a press release issued Monday. Sunday night the State treated Jefferson, Orange, and Chambers counties where they planned to spray again Monday evening. They also covered Jackson and DeWitt counties. DSHS said flights over Brazoria County could begin as early as Tuesday.

Last week, DSHS announced spraying in Aransas, Bee, Nueces, Refugio, and San Patricio counties. It remains unclear when Harris County will be treated, according to the Houston Chronicle.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott declared 58 counties disaster areas. President Donald Trump quickly responded by approving the State's request for federal emergency assistance, Breitbart Texas reported.

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Health officials said they coordinated aerial spraying efforts with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). U.S. Air Force Reserve's C-130H cargo aircraft equipped with nozzles that create "ultra low volume droplets" disperse small amounts of insecticides, one to two teaspoons per acre, to kill mosquitoes on contact.

On Saturday, the Beaumont Enterprise alerted residents the airplanes would fly at low altitudes when spraying. Breitbart Texas reported that Beaumont was hit hard by the mega-storm's flooding. It later caused the municipal water system to fail for several days.

Public health officials said aerial spraying does not pose a health risk to humans, pets, or the environment as the droplets target mosquitoes and excess insecticide quickly breaks down once it hits the ground, surfaces, water, and sunlight. They spray at sundown to minimize any effects on beneficial insects like bees, which have already returned to their hives for the night. People may prefer to stay indoors and close windows during spraying but the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) said this was not necessary.

DSHS spokesman Chris Van Deusen noted most mosquitoes that appear following floods are "nuisance" insects. They do not spread disease but their sheer volume can impede upon disaster recovery operations by first responders.

Still, Harvey-flooded areas laden with standing water act like incubators for Aedes aegypti mosquitoes, which are indigenous to the state. Breitbart Texas reported that through its bite, this insect transmits West Nile Virus (WNV), Zika, Dengue fever, and Chikungunya.

Van Deusen told Breitbart Texas that WNV is of particular concern because of its prevalence in the Lone Star State. As of September 5, Texas confirmed 57 cases for 2017, including three deaths. Last year, DSHS reported 370 cases and 18 deaths.

Health officials caution that most people who get infected do not get sick, although roughly 20 percent will experience symptoms of West Nile fever such as headache, fever, muscle and joint aches, nausea, and fatigue. DSHS says in one percent or less of infected individuals the virus can affect the nervous system, causing West Nile neuroinvasive disease and may include neurological symptoms like disorientation, tremors, convulsions, paralysis, coma, and even death.

In regards to Zika, pregnant women remain the most vulnerable population because of the related health risks to their unborn babies, mainly, microcephaly, the birth defect characterized by a baby born with a very small head and severe brain damage, as Breitbart Texas reported. Through September 1, the state accounted for 26 Zika cases, although it is unknown how many of these infections were pregnant women.

One county earmarked for aerial spraying, Cameron, contains the city of Brownsville. This border community is the site of the state's first locally transmitted Zika case, reported in December. Breitbart Texas reported this quickly became five cases and by mid-month, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a travel warning to the county.

Even with aerial spraying, Van Deusen urged residents in Harvey-affected areas to wear repellent to guard against mosquito bites.

Follow Merrill Hope, a member of the original Breitbart Texas team, on Twitter.

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Texas in dire need of relief

Express-News Editorial Board **Published 5:24 pm, Monday, September 11, 2017**

Civilians and the National Guard look for people in need of evacuation from an apartment complex in west Houston, Sept. 1. Federal aid must be dispensed efficiently and according to need.

The need for federal aid is urgent. Preliminary estimates for Hurricane Harvey's damages are in the ballpark of $190 billion, USA Today reports; that's the cost of Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy combined. And Hurricane Irma is sure to increase that need elsewhere.

On Wednesday, the House of Representatives approved $7.9 billion in disaster relief funds. The Senate voted Thursday 80-17 on a package of about $15 billion in disaster aid, dispersed evenly between Hurricane Harvey victims and Community Block Grants for all 2017 disasters, including Irma. The House concurred and the president signed the bill on Friday.

The House and Senate have acted swiftly and are to be commended.

In a rare nod to Senate Democrats, Trump tied the disaster relief bill to another, more controversial bill raising the debt ceiling, keeping the government running until early December and setting up an end-of-the-year fiscal showdown.

Here's where possible political party tricks might have come into play. Rep. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.), chairman of the House Freedom Caucus, said, "Anytime you use a tragedy to advance something that should have had a plan without a hurricane happening is not an appropriate approach."

Almost correct. In an ideal world, the debt ceiling would be automatically approved and would not be held hostage, as has been done or attempted in other circumstances, by the Freedom Caucus to gain concessions on other fronts. Disaster aid, raising the debt ceiling *and avoiding a government shutdown at a time of national crisis* all aid that effort.

Yes, there is seeming irony in Texas being the beneficiary of federal aid — and correctly anxious to get it. Texas — whose former Gov. Rick Perry wrote a book titled "Fed Up! Our Fight to Save America From Washington" — has a long history of opposition to much federal spending.

But, federal disaster aid is not the same as disagreements on EPA policies or on immigration or on gay marriage or … the policy list is long.

Texas got hit. Hard. And Hurricane Irma did the same for other parts of the country. In such times, the aid must be commensurate to the task and as immediate as possible.

John Wittman, press secretary for Gov. Abbott (R-Texas), got it right: "It's asinine to think that after this catastrophic hurricane, the federal government would not step up to help communities recover and rebuild like it has in the past."

At times such as these — and, again, in that ideal world — there are no red states or blue states. Just United States. Let's remember that when disaster strikes Americans elsewhere.

But we haven't always. Every Texas Republican in the U.S. House with the exception of Rep. John Culberson of Houston made headlines by voting against the Disaster Relief

Act of 2013, which allocated federal funds for Hurricane Sandy relief. And both Texas Republicans in the Senate, Ted Cruz and John Cornyn, also voted against the measure.

That Disaster Relief Act ultimately passed nonetheless. The Texas delegation was mostly unified in backing the disaster aid this time, but four Texans voted no. They are: GOP Reps Joe Barton, Sam Johnson, Jeb Hensarling and Mac Thornberry. Voters should remember.

The rebuilding will be long and arduous. The federal aid must be delivered expeditiously according to need. Texas — whose own stepped up to help their own — will be stronger than ever after Americans elsewhere step up to aid Americans in need anywhere.

After the damage is repaired and people are able to resume their lives, let us remember that the federal government came to the rescue.

Because that was its job.

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In this March 10, 2016 photo, Scott Pruitt, Oklahoma Attorney General, gestures as he speaks during an interview in Oklahoma City, Okla. **Photo by Sue Ogrocki/AP**

EPA chief: It's 'insensitive' to mention climate change right now

09/12/17 08:00 AM – UPDATED 09/12/17 08:52 AM

By Steve Benen

It's fair to say all is not well at the Environmental Protection Agency.

Scott Pruitt, the EPA chief who's long opposed the EPA's work, is at the center of multiple controversies. The Government Accountability Office is investigating whether the EPA violated ethics rules in its hiring practices. The EPA's press office recently went after a reporter as if it were a Republican campaign operation.

Making matters considerably worse, the *Washington Post* reported last week that the EPA has put a political operative with little environmental policy experience, John Konkus, in charge of "vetting the hundreds of millions of dollars in grants the EPA distributes annually." The report explained that Konkus "reviews every award the agency gives out, along with every grant solicitation before it is issued." As part of his reviews, he looks out for "the double C-word" – climate change – and according to the *Post*, he's repeatedly "instructed grant officers to eliminate references to the subject in solicitations."

Christie Todd Whitman, a former Republican governor who ran the EPA in George W. Bush's first term, wrote a *New York Times* op-ed last week explaining that all of this helps show "how not to run" the Environmental Protection Agency.

It's against this backdrop that the administrator of the EPA has discovered a new justification for ignoring the climate crisis.

> *For scientists, drawing links between warming global temperatures and the ferocity of hurricanes is about as controversial as talking about geology after an earthquake. But in Washington, where science is increasingly political, the fact that oceans and atmosphere are warming and that the heat is propelling storms into superstorms has become as sensitive as talking about gun control in the wake of a mass shooting.*
>
> *"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," Mr. Pruitt said to CNN in an interview ahead of Hurricane Irma, echoing similar sentiments he made when Hurricane Harvey made landfall in Texas two weeks earlier. "To use time and effort to address it at this point is very, very insensitive to this people in Florida," he added.*

He didn't appear to be kidding. The head of the EPA believes addressing climate change in the wake of deadly hurricanes might hurt Floridians' feelings.

For what it's worth, White House Homeland Security Adviser Tom Bossert told reporters yesterday, "I will tell you that we continue to take seriously the climate change – not the cause of it, but the things that we observe."

That's not much of an answer, since addressing the causes of the crisis is key to preventing future disasters. But if we grade on a very generous curve, the fact that a White House official used "the double C-word" during a press briefing is a step up from the EPA's current leadership.

It does, however, lead to a fairly follow-up question: if Bossert is right, and Trump administration officials take climate change "seriously," can anyone at the White House explain what that means in practical terms? *How* is the administration taking global warming "seriously"?

Explore: The MaddowBlog, Climate, Climate Change, EPA, Environment, Environmental Policy, Global Warming and Green

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ENVIRONMENT & NATURE

Report: San Antonio Behind on 'Green' Stormwater Infrastructure

IRIS DIMMICK

3 HOURS AGO

BONNIE ARBITTIER / RIVARD REPORT

Water floods the intersection of Ave. B and 12th St. during Tropical Storm Harvey.

UPDATED 1 MIN AGO

Texas' five largest cities still have work to do when it comes to deploying citywide stormwater management, according to a scorecard released Monday by Environment Texas (http://www.environmenttexas.org/) .

Researchers with the environmental advocacy group graded cities according to 10-step regulation and education efforts surrounding green stormwater infrastructure (https://www.epa.gov/green-infrastructure/what-green-infrastructure) (GSI), also known as low-impact development (https://www.sara-tx.org/lid-sustainability/low-impact-development/) (LID). Austin is, unsurprisingly, ahead of other cities with 9 points (90%) compared to San Antonio's 6.5 (65%), followed by Fort Worth (60%), Houston (50%), and Dallas (40%).

San Antonio lacks rules that requires developers to plan for on-site stormwater retention. In the report's grading system, the city received only partial credit for on-site pollution control and regulatory credit policies. While some financial incentives for developers and homeowners are available through the San Antonio River Authority (https://www.sara-tx.org/) and other entities, there are few regulatory incentives through the City and Bexar County. Neither requires low-impact development features for new or redeveloped buildings; such features are voluntary (https://library.municode.com/tx/san_antonio/codes/unified_development_code?nodeId=ARTIIUSPA_S35-210LOIMDENACHDEPRLINC) . Only projects that are near the San Antonio River in RIO planning overlay districts (http://www.sanantonio.gov/historic/historicsites/Zoning) are required to adhere (https://library.municode.com/tx/san_antonio/codes/unified_development_code?nodeId=ARTVIHIPRURDE_DIV6RIDI_S35-673SIDEST) to LID standards.

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Low-impact development features are architectural and irrigation elements that allow buildings to retain and filter rainwater rather than pass off often-contaminated water to already-strained, traditional drainage systems like underground pipes and street curbs. For developers, however, the upfront costs of LID exceed that of typical impervious surfaces such as paved parking lots, so many would not welcome increased LID regulations.

"Stormwater is most commonly viewed as an issue for flood management," the report states. "The conventional approach has been to move runoff away from buildings and roads and into natural water bodies as quickly as possible, and to do this with concrete curbs, pipes, drains, and tunnels. But this gray infrastructure is now being supplemented by green infrastructure, which uses plants, soil, and natural processes to manage runoff on-site."

The more impervious surfaces – that is, surfaces that water cannot penetrate – that development creates, the more water can flood the city. As the San Antonio area braces for 1 million additional inhabitants by 2040, city leaders will be looking for ways to balance that growth with environmental sustainability.

There is little anyone can do to avoid the catastrophic destruction that more than 50 inches of rain, as seen during Hurricane Harvey (https://therivardreport.com/tag/hurricane-harvey/) in Houston, wreaks on a city. But LID provides relatively simple ways to "avoid smaller, local flooding" experienced throughout Texas by using rain gardens, bio swells, water capture and cisterns, permeable pavement, and more, report author Brian Zabcik told the *Rivard Report*. The report is based on the Environmental Protection Agency's policy checklist, which provides a list of ways to incentivize and promote private and public adoption of LID standards.

TEXAS STORMWATER SCORECARD

1.0 points—Policy or program is either mandatory or applied in all possible instances
0.5 points—Policy or program is either optional or applied in limited instances

POLICY	AUSTIN	DALLAS	FORT WORTH	HOUSTON	SAN ANTONIO
PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES					
Flood detention requirement An amount of stormwater must be detained on-site for flood control	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Water quality requirement An amount of stormwater must be treated on-site for pollutant removal	1.0		0.5	0.5	0.5
GSI/LID regulatory credit GSI/LID features can be used to meet water quality and/or flood detention requirements	1.0		0.5	0.5	0.5
Stormwater retention requirement An amount of stormwater must be retained on-site	0.5				
PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVES					
Regulatory incentives Zoning upgrades, expedited permitting, or other incentives are provided for using GSI/LID	0.5		0.5	0.5	0.5
Financial incentives Rebates, tax credits, or other forms of funding are provided for using GSI/LID	1.0				0.5
Stormwater fee discount Fee is reduced for for developments using GSI/LID features	1.0	0.5	0.5		0.5
PUBLIC INITIATIVES					
Capital project construction GSI/LID features are included in the construction of public buildings and facilities	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Street construction GSI/LID features are included in the construction of streets and transportation elements	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Education Public awareness is developed through GSI/LID signage, written materials, and other efforts	1.0	0.5	1.0	0.5	1.0
TOTAL POINTS	9	4	6	5	6.5
PERCENTAGE SCORE	**90%**	**40%**	**60%**	**50%**	**65%**

COURTESY / ENVIRONMENT TEXAS RESEARCH & POLICY CENTER
Ten points are possible on the Texas Stormwater Scorecard.

"… [W]e found that even Austin has room for improvement, especially given that the actual use of GSI/LID in the city is low," stated the report. "Fort Worth and San Antonio chalked up respectable mid-range scores, and both are poised to do more because of strong support for GSI/LID from local water authorities. While Dallas and Houston have taken some encouraging steps, GSI/LID is a low priority in both."

San Antonio scored well on the "public initiatives" section of the scorecard as many new city buildings have LID features, including the Mission Branch Library, (http://mysapl.org/Visit/Locations/Mission-Library) where water advocates and partners including the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance (http://www.aquiferalliance.net/) will gather to formally announce the scorecard results Tuesday morning.

The report, produced by Environment Texas Research & Policy Center (http://www.environmenttexascenter.org/), is available to download from their website here (http://environmenttexascenter.org/reports/txe/texas-stormwater-scorecard).

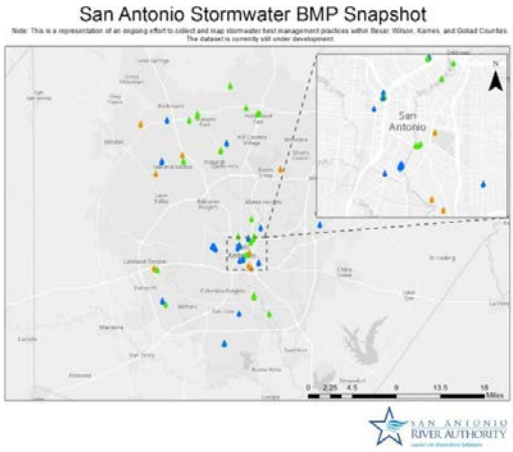
Mission Branch Library.

The library's air conditioner and roof deposits condensate and rainwater into large cisterns for landscape irrigation. Drought-resistant plants have been chosen for the facility's rain garden, and most of the parking lot is made of permeable material. A donation from SAWS made the LID enhancements to the library possible. The library partnered with Texas Public Radio for a volunteer event to install the rain garden during National Public Lands Day in 2011.

Zabcik, a clean-water advocate for Environment Texas, will be presenting his report's findings during the 2017 EPA Region 6 Stormwater Conference (http://tamuk-isee.com/epa2017conference/) next week in San Antonio. Environment Texas originally planned to release the scorecard during the conference, but Zabcik felt it that after Harvey the topic was too timely to wait.

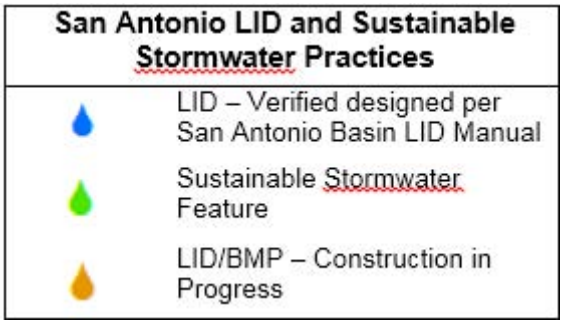
The biggest advocate for GSI/LID implementation locally is the San Antonio River Authority. Since fiscal year 2015, it allocated almost $1.3 million to help LID projects through its Watershed Wise Rebate (https://www.sara-tx.org/lid-sustainability/low-impact-development/rebate-program/) budget, and nine school projects were funded at local schools through its Watershed Wise School Grant (https://www.sara-tx.org/lid-sustainability/green-infrastructure/) program at around $22,000 to $25,000 each.

Through targeted and general training sessions over recent years, the River Authority has reached out engineers, landscape architects, contractors, developers, and business owners about the immediate and longterm benefits of LID.



COURTESY / SAN ANTONIO RIVER AUTHORITY

This map shows low impact development projects completed or in progress in the City of San Antonio.



"The City, County, and River Authority has been working very hard the last few years to educate the community on LID," said Karen Bishop, the River Authority's green infrastructure expert. "[We want to] eliminate the mystery of this new way of designing, and we've seen quite a bit of success and projects going in the ground as the result of the LID manual (https://www.sara-tx.org/lid-sustainability/lid-services/) , grant (https://www.sara-tx.org/lid-sustainability/green-infrastructure/) , and rebate (https://www.sara-tx.org/lid-sustainability/low-impact-development/rebate-program/) programs."

The River Authority worked with the City through the development code update process that resulted in easier access for developers to build or install LID features. As of February 2016, when that section of code was approved by City Council, developers don't have to apply for a variance in order to do so, Bishop said.

But Council did not approve what the River Authority recommended. One of the many significant changes was amending the directive "shall" to "may" in several instances.

"So low impact development is more of a suggestion. It's not incorporated as a requirement," said Annalisa Peace, executive director of the Aquifer Alliance.

Impervious cover restrictions encountered similar pushback during the SA Tomorrow comprehensive plan adoption later that year. Originally, the sustainable strategy read: "Develop and implement effective impervious surface standards for new development and redevelopment projects."

Now the strategy is to, "through a representative stakeholder process, conduct a science-based assessment of the impact of increased impervious cover and determine if development standards are needed to address flooding, water quality, and urban heat islands."

An important mechanism to increase LID use, Peace said, is increased stormwater fees, which are set by the City and added to each SAWS bill according to the level of impervious cover based on rate and volume of storm water runoff.

“The fees aren’t high enough to encourage developers,” Peace said. “So instead, taxpayers end up paying for new stormwater projects.”

The proposed fiscal year 2018 budget includes a nominal increase, 4.22%, for commercial and residential SAWS customers (http://www.sanantonio.gov/TCI/Projects/Storm-Water-Fee) . That budget will go before City Council for adoption on Thursday. The increased revenue, an estimated $2 million, will pay for six drainage-related capital projects.

But GSI and LID are not part of the average person’s lexicon, said SAWS Director of Conservation Karen Guz. So SAWS is partnering with the River Authority to offer more discounts and rebates on LID and conservation-related activities for residential and commercial customers.

One of the most popular and recent programs has been the SAWS rain barrel coupons (http://www.saws.org/rainbarrels) .

“Ultimately, we want to see more green infrastructure built in Texas because we think that it’s an essential tool of reducing water pollution in the state and reduce flood severity,” Zabcik said. “Short-term, I hope this report raises the visibility and public awareness of green infrastructure and to start a statewide conversation.”

The New York Times | https://nyti.ms/2xW53GY

HEALTH

Houston's Floodwaters Are Tainted With Toxins, Testing Shows

By SHEILA KAPLAN and JACK HEALY SEPT. 11, 2017

HOUSTON — Floodwaters in two Houston neighborhoods have been contaminated with bacteria and toxins that can make people sick, testing organized by The New York Times has found. Residents will need to take precautions to return safely to their homes, public health experts said.

It is not clear how far the toxic waters have spread. But Fire Chief Samuel Peña of Houston said over the weekend that there had been breaches at numerous waste treatment plants. The Environmental Protection Agency said on Monday that 40 of 1,219 such plants in the area were not working.

The results of The Times's testing were troubling. Water flowing down Briarhills Parkway in the Houston Energy Corridor contained Escherichia coli, a measure of fecal contamination, at a level more than four times that considered safe.

In the Clayton Homes public housing development downtown, along the Buffalo Bayou, scientists found what they considered astonishingly high levels of E. coli in standing water in one family's living room — levels 135 times those considered safe — as well as elevated levels of lead, arsenic and other heavy metals in sediment from the floodwaters in the kitchen.

"There's pretty clearly sewage contamination, and it's more concentrated inside the home than outside the home," said Lauren Stadler, an assistant professor of

civil and environmental engineering at Rice University who participated in The Times's research.

"It suggests to me that conditions inside the home are more ideal for bacteria to grow and concentrate. It's warmer and the water has stagnated for days and days. I know some kids were playing in the floodwater outside those places. That's concerning to me."

The Associated Press and CNN last week reported high levels of E. coli contamination, but did not specify where the samples were taken.

The E.P.A. and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality have expressed concern about toxic floodwaters, but have not made public the results of sampling they may have done.

Residents and medical professionals said they are seeing infections that likely resulted from exposure to the dirty floodwaters.

Dr. Beau Briese, an emergency room physician at Houston Methodist Hospital, said he had seen a doubling in the number of cases of cellulitis — reddened skin infections — since the storm. He said it was a more modest increase than he had expected, and that the infections had been successfully treated with antibiotics.

Dr. David Persse, the chief medical officer of Houston, said residents caring for children, the elderly and those with immune disorders should try to keep them out of homes until they have been cleaned.

"Everybody has to consider the floodwater contaminated," Dr. Persse said. He also warned residents to avoid letting cuts and scrapes come into contact with the floodwaters, which can cause infection.

Brad Greer, 49, developed two scabby infections on each of his legs where rain boots had irritated his skin. He took antibiotics, but on Saturday, he said, he started feeling lightheaded and weak as he and his brother-in-law tried to move possessions from Mr. Greer's flooded home.

He went to the emergency room at Houston Methodist, where he was put on an intravenous drip and given another antibiotic prescription. Mr. Greer said swimming pools around his neighborhood are rank.

"All the pools are just giant toilets you're unable to flush," he said.

The lab analysis was paid for by The Times. The sampling was conducted by a team from Baylor Medical College and Rice University, working with the Houston health department's Bureau of Pollution Control and Prevention.

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The group, accompanied by Times reporters [illegible] sediment samples last week by boat, truck and on foot. The samples were analyzed by A & B Labs, a state-certified service that often works with federal agencies.

The dearth of information about the safety of the water has upset many residents, including Maria Sotolongo, who lives with her husband and three children on Briarhills Parkway, an upscale development in Houston's West Oaks/Eldridge neighborhood.

"Nobody has told us not to come," Mrs. Sotolongo said on Sunday, the first day she was able to get back into her house.

Earlier in the week, she had helped The Times's team reach her home by boat in order to take water and sediment samples on what had been her front lawn.

"It's a horrific smell and full of gunk," she said. "We've seen fish in parts of the kitchen."

Mrs. Sotolongo was well outfitted in rubber boots, gloves and a mask. But some families in inundated neighborhoods in west Houston said they had developed staph infections and other health problems after wading through waters released from reservoirs that swamped their homes long after other parts of the city had dried out.

"It scared us to death," said John Denson, 40, who lives in the Nottingham Forest neighborhood. He had waded through the murky waters with his wife and two sons to try to salvage things from their home.

Mr. Denson said infections had festered on a cut to his hand and small scratches where the waterproof waders his family wore had rubbed skin raw. In addition, Mr. Denson said that his 14-year-old son, who has asthma, started coughing and had difficulty breathing after being inside their home.

"Coughing up a lung," Mr. Denson said.

Roderick Francis, 47, who has been living with his wife, Kimberly, and four of their children in Clayton Homes, was also unaware of the health risks.

"I know the houses all flooded like mine," he said. "I didn't know of any contamination."

Mrs. Francis said the couple came back to salvage their belongings from the house, but found it too putrid to stay for long. She was troubled by the yellow, green and black mold already appearing on the couch — as well as by the information that testers had found elevated levels of lead and arsenic, which are neurotoxins, in the floodwater.

The family will not go back to live in their house, and will likely move to Dallas.

Winifred Hamilton, director of the Environmental Health Service at Baylor College of Medicine and a member of the testing group, said she is especially worried about exposure to mold among people who are moving back or who bring along their children as they try to clean and repair their houses.

"I'd be wearing a mask with a filter," she said, "and goggles and gloves, with rubber boots. I would change my clothes immediately after leaving the house, and put them in the wash with nothing else."

"Mold is taking off all over the city," Ms. Hamilton added. "People with allergies or asthma are particularly sensitive to it. If people have bad headaches, respiratory problems, swelling of a limb or a bad rash, go see a doctor right away. Don't assume it will go away on its own."

Ms. Hamilton also encouraged people to keep an eye on their kids.

"We have a lot of what looks like sand, like something you might want to make a castle of," she said. "But this is not clean sand, this is sludge sediment."

"Don't let your children play in sediment from the flood. We don't want children playing in lead."

A version of this article appears in print on September 12, 2017, on Page A13 of the New York edition with the headline: Houston Floodwaters Are Tainted With Bacteria and Toxins, Tests Show.

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MONSANTO LEVELS CRITICISM AT ARKANSAS WEED SCIENTISTS

"SAD DAY IN WEED SCIENCE," SAYS ONE EXTENSION WEED SCIENTIST

Monsanto officials disagree. In a letter last week to Hutchinson, Rob Fraley, who is Monsanto chief technology officer, urged Hutchinson to reject the recommendation.

"While investigation of the 2017 reports is not complete, the available evidence establishes that Arkansas farmers can use new, low-volatility dicamba formulations safely and effectively to control resistant weeds," he wrote in a letter released last week.

LEVELING THE CRITICISM

support of a statewide ban on dicamba in 2018. Monsanto says Baldwin works as a paid consultant for Bayer CropScience, which now owns the competing Liberty Link technology that features soybeans that tolerate glufosinate (Liberty). Monsanto officials also cited concerns about Baldwin being an expert witness for plaintiffs in a dicamba lawsuit against Monsanto.

However, Baldwin stated in an email that he didn't make that statement in support of a statewide dicamba ban in 2018 at dicamba task force meetings. He wrote that if Monsanto cannot show documentation either in audio or transcript form, it should retract the accusation.

Company spokespersons said a transcript of the meetings was not available.

"Our petition relied on information provided to us by a person who was in attendance at the meeting who reported to us that Dr. Baldwin spoke in support of a ban in 2018," wrote Samuel Murphey, a Monsanto spokesman in an email last Thursday.

Monsanto officials also cite a passage in a September 6, 2017, Delta Farm Press article Baldwin wrote in which he said the "best current solution to stopping the off-target dicamba problems is to stop the in-season use and regroup."

Baldwin says Monsanto's accusation is based on hearsay. "The only time I spoke at the first meeting was in response to a question from a member regarding what I had observed in my travels to the Midwest. The record will clearly show I made no effort to influence the task force in either meeting," he wrote in an email. He says videos of both task force meetings are now public and clearly show he never made the statement.

Baldwin says the Delta Farm Press article was written after the task force decision. He does support the task force's decision in that he says it is the only way to stop off-target movement in cotton and soybeans. However, he says that differs from Monsanto's accusation.

LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITY CRITICISMS

Monsanto has also criticized Norsworthy's research and data. In the Monsanto petition to the Arkansas plant board, Monsanto officials say Norsworthy publicly endorses a competing weed control technology – Liberty Link featuring glufosinate-tolerant technology for soybeans.

"His glufosinate endorsements occurred both before and during the time that Dr. Norsworthy was supposed to be conducting an objective examination of dicamba," the petition stated.

It also said that Norsworthy provided a summary presentation – without substantial scientific data – at the first meeting of the Arkansas dicamba task force, advocating a complete statewide ban on dicamba in 2018.

"Dr. Norsworthy's endorsement of competing weed control technology for several years, combined with his outlier findings concerning XtendiMax, warrant skepticism of Norsworthy's objectivity in this situation," the petition stated.

Not so, say University of Arkansas administrators. It's backing Norsworthy. This is a statement by Mark Cochran, vice president of agriculture for the U of A Division of Agriculture:

"First, and most importantly, we stand by the integrity of our scientists and their science, including Dr. Jason Norsworthy, our internationally recognized researcher and his work, and all our weed scientists, as well as other

"Even Monsanto recognizes his (Norsworthy's) reputation. Just 48 hours before the petition was filed, the company invited Dr. Norsworthy to present a summary of national drift and volatility research at an academic summit on dicamba that the company is hosting in St. Louis this month. He has declined this invitation.

"We will examine every point in this petition and its appearing and disappearing group of supporting exhibits, and over time will respond factually to its major points.

"We have made our explanations available to the public, including at field days and through videos of the presentations that were and are still public on the Cooperative Extension Service site, www.uaex.edu. Our public land grant research results are scientifically vetted and valid, and we are pledged to being transparent in our results."

Bayer Crop Science — whose parent company is in the process of buying Monsanto – backs both Norsworthy and Baldwin with this statement:

"We trust that a regulatory system based in sound science will allow growers to have access to the safe, effective tools they need in a way that allows all technologies to coexist. Doctors Baldwin and Norsworthy are two of the preeminent weed scientists in the country, and their voices along with other scientists' are critical to ensuring sound science that supports the regulatory system. Their expertise, science and dedication to the Weed Science Society of America speaks for itself."

WHAT MONSANTO SAYS

"The criticism is not intended to be personal of Dr. Baldwin or Dr. Norsworthy," says Scott Partridge, Monsanto vice president of global strategy. "Dr. Baldwin and Dr. Norsworthy are respected and have a long history in that state. As this process goes forward, it is critical, from our perspective, that the process not involve a predetermined conclusion or bias."

Monsanto says testing for volatility on its XtendiMax with VaporGrip Technology included testing in over 1,200 GLP (Good Laboratory Practices) studies over 25 geographies. (The Environmental Protection Agency's Good Laboratory Practice Standards (GLPS) compliance monitoring program ensures the quality and integrity of test data submitted to the EPA.)

Monsanto officials say these studies showed consistent findings supporting low-volatility claims of Xtendimax with VaporGrip Techology between controlled environments and field studies in various geographies.

"If we submit studies that have bias, they (EPA) will reject them out of hand," says Partridge. "That is why we use GLP standards. The opinions expressed by Dr. Baldwin and Dr. Norsworthy are outliers with the tests we have done."

In Norsworthy's case, though, they're consistent with studies done by other land-grant university weed scientists, said the U of A's Cochran in a statement.

"First, Norsworthy's findings are anything but an outlier. It is consistent with research work in other states, including that of Kevin Bradley in Missouri, Tom Mueller and Larry Steckel in Tennessee, and elsewhere. Second, none of our researchers has ever endorsed any product, but sometimes companies use our public comments and statements without our permission. Based on Monsanto's allegations, we intend, under the terms of our agreements with Monsanto, to publish all data relevant to our dicamba work over the last few years. This petition isn't just about a single herbicide, but it's an attack on a whole profession – scientists whose careful work is meant to be of benefit to all."

"To me, it's a sad day in weed science when the industry has reached a point where instead of debating data, they instead launch attacks on the credibility of public-sector weed scientists. It's ironic that the company whose own credibility has been tarnished by these dicamba-related issues now appears to find it acceptable to attack the credibility of others with whom they disagree.

"Perhaps Monsanto might consider that Dr. Norsworthy supports weed management programs based on the data he and other academic weed scientists generate. I've always believed that to be the job of public-sector weed scientists; to do the independent research and share that information with their constituents.

"Now, I'm beginning to I wonder if Monsanto will label as noncredible other university weed scientists who recommend competitor products or programs. I've always believed my responsibility to Illinois farmers is to recommend those products or programs that, based on our data and data from my academic weed science colleagues, best meet the needs of Illinois farmers. If that is Monsanto's criteria for not being credible, then they are more than free to label me as noncredible. I have been very proud to serve Illinois agriculture for over 24 years and always have do so as impartially, openly, and honestly as I could."

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Author: gil.gullickson Posted: 09-12-2017

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All, Next week, I'll be at a Bayer meeting in Germany where I'll have a chance to talk to some ...[More]

Author: gil.gullickson Posted: 09-12-2017

Monsanto vs. land-grant weed scientists on dicamba

All, I filed this story yesterday on Monsanto taking on a couple weed scientists' research/data--one currently with the University of ...[More]

Author: gil.gullickson Posted: 09-12-2017

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TCEQ to host public meeting to discuss pending dairy farm near Panhandle

Published: Monday, September 11th 2017, 2:39 pm CDT
Updated: Monday, September 11th 2017, 3:26 pm CDT

By Kaitlin Johnson, Digital Content Executive Producer CONNECT

PANHANDLE, TX (KFDA) - The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) will host a public meeting this Tuesday to discuss opening a **new dairy facility near Panhandle**.

The meeting will begin at 6:00 p.m. at the Panhandle High School Auditorium located at 106 West 11th.

The public is invited to ask questions concerning the permit application for the dairy farm at this meeting.

According to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), Bowers Land and Cattle Family Limited Partnership has requested a permit to operate a new dairy facility in Carson County.

The dairy would house about 10,000 head of cattle and 6,500 of them would be milking cows.

If the permit passes, the dairy would be located three and a half miles southwest of Panhandle and many community members are not looking forward to having this type of operation so close to the city.

The TCEQ highlights no discharge of pollutants into the waters will be authorized by the permit except under chronic or catastrophic rainfall conditions or events.

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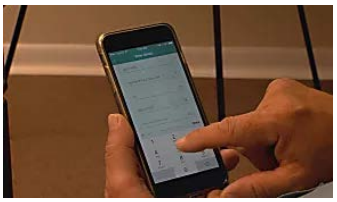
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TCEQ issues Ozone Action Day for Corpus Christi area

Posted: Sep 11, 2017 5:00 PM CDT
Updated: Sep 11, 2017 5:00 PM CDT

Photo: Corpus Christi Bay

CORPUS CHRISTI - The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality has issued an Ozone Action Day for the Corpus Christi area for tomorrow Tuesday, September 12, 2017.

A reverse alert message was sent out around 4:30 pm Monday afternoon.

The message added," Atmospheric conditions are expected to be favorable for producing high levels of ozone air pollution in the Corpus Christi area on Tuesday."

According to the TCEQ website, El Paso, Houston, and San Antonio will also be an Ozone Action Day.

Winds may be light enough and incoming background levels high enough for ozone to reach "Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups" or possibly higher on the south and southeast sides of the Corpus Christi, Houston, and San Antonio areas and in central, northern, and northwestern parts of the El Paso area.

"Moderate" or possibly higher in parts of the Austin area; and "Moderate" in parts of the Dallas-Fort Worth, Victoria, and Waco-Killeen areas, with highest concentrations in the afternoon and early evening.

For more information, click here.

Reading on your phone? Download the KRIS 6 News Mobile App for iOS/iPhone here and for Android here.

Water boil lifted in Aransas Pass

Alexandria Rodriguez, Corpus Christi Published 2:34 p.m. CT Sept. 11, 2017

(Photo: Courtney Sacco/Caller-Times)

The water boil order in Aransas Pass has been rescinded.

The Aransas Pass Police Department posted Monday on its Facebook page the city's water no longer requires boiling prior to use.

On Aug. 27, two days after Hurricane Harvey hit the city, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality required the Aransas Pass public water system to issue a notice that all residents should boil their water before drinking or consumption, the post states.

Since then, the public water system has taken corrective actions and provided TCEQ with laboratory test results that show water no longer needs to be boiled before consumption, the post reads.

Read or Share this story: http://callertim.es/2y0jcnF

World Socialist Web Site wsws.org

Petrochemical giants dumped deadly carcinogens during Hurricane Harvey

By Gary Joad
12 September 2017

As Hurricane and Tropical Storm Harvey bore down on and flooded the northern Gulf Coast last month with an estimated 20 trillion gallons of rain, some 60 plants belonging to the world's petrochemical giants on the Texas coast began shutdown procedures. During this time they vented and dumped almost a million pounds of some of the most deadly chemical compounds on earth.

"Total air pollutants from all oil and gas facilities added up to 5.6 million pounds," according to an analysis released September 1 by the Center for Biological Diversity. The deadly cocktail that included benzene, hexane, sulfur dioxide, 1,3-butadiene, and xylene were dumped or spilled during the storm by ExxonMobil, Shell, and Chevron Phillips and other petrochemical giants over a period of eight days beginning August 23.

Reports filed by the refining industry with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) confirmed that residents of Harris County and the surrounding area sustained 61 percent of the un-permitted emissions of toxic dumping than occurred in all of 2016. The dumping of these compounds included over 13 tons of benzene.

Significantly, Houston, Texas has never met national air quality standards since the passage of the Clean Air Act of 1970.

When TCEQ spokeswoman Andrea Morrow was queried about the findings, she was quoted as saying, "All measured concentrations were well below levels of health concern," and that "local residents should not be concerned about air quality issues related to the effects of the storm." The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) stated it was observing the situation with "air quality buses," though how this was done in the midst of a flood was not explained.

According to a Las Vegas Review-Journal article appearing September 8, the chief Houston Health Department scientist Loren Raun reported that a department air quality monitor measured an astonishing level of 14,000 parts per billion of volatile organic compounds downwind of the Valero Partners refinery on Houston's east side, where a heavy roof had collapsed into a reservoir of stored chemicals during the storm.

For the duration of the storm-related events, Texas Governor Greg Abbott decreed a temporary suspension of emission regulations. The state's air quality monitors were also shut off, with the initial explanation that officials made this decision to prevent damage to the expensive instrumentation. Later, air quality spokespersons began telling the press the monitors were damaged during the storm.

Ruben Basurto, a 33-year-old construction worker living two blocks from the refinery reported that the smell drove him and his friends indoors. Cindy Sanchez, 32, told the press that she became sick to her stomach and had eye burning. Nearby Galena Park mothers opened a Facebook page to describe their illnesses, saying the discharge smelled like "sweet gasoline," or raw sewage in very thick air.

A local environmental activist Juan Flores said, "a lot of people are afraid to talk, because their husbands work at the plants." He also said many of the residents near the refineries want to see a doctor, but they have no insurance or means to pay.

Daniel Cohan, an environmental scientist at Rice University, pointed out that the refineries, during a significant storm, delay shutdown until the very last moment. When the event is passed, they restart quickly, causing a very dramatic surge in emissions. He added, "These plants are three to four decades old," and that the facilities are outmoded and badly overdue for modernization.

In 2010, ExxonMobil, Chevron-Phillips, and Shell were sued by the Sierra Club and Environment Texas, and this May were ordered by a federal judge to pay a settlement of $27.8 million. ExxonMobil's share was $19.9 million and the energy conglomerate filed an appeal.

The federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) issued a Public Health Statement in August, 2007 regarding benzene, noting that it is a colorless liquid with a sweet odor, which can be smelled by humans at about 60 parts per million (ppm) of air, and correctly identified at 100 ppm. Benzene can be tasted in water at 0.5-4.5 ppm, and 1 ppm is about 1 drop in 40 gallons of water. It is in the top 20 chemicals produced in the US, used in making plastic foam and other plastics, some types of rubber, lubricants, dyes, detergents, drugs, and pesticides. It is also present in crude oil, gasoline and cigarettes.

Benzene is also slightly soluble in water, and will make its way from soil into aquifers. About 20 percent of human exposure in the US is from auto exhaust and industrial emissions. Fifty percent enters the body by breathing, and lesser amounts by ingestion and through the skin. Its human metabolites include phenol, muconic acid, and S-phenylmercapturic acid, which are known to cause leukemia and liver cancers.

At least a quarter million workers are significantly exposed to benzene in the US petrochemical and refining industry, tire manufacturing, shoe making, printing, in lab technology, fire fighting, and gasoline stations.

A 5-10 minute respiratory exposure to benzene can be fatal at air levels of 10,000-20,000 ppm, in the range captured by Houston's health department monitor cited earlier. The compound will produce dizziness, nausea, headaches, rapid heartbeat, drowsiness, and unconsciousness at 700-3000 ppm. The US Department of Health and Human Services, the EPA, and the International Agency for Cancer Research identify benzene as a carcinogen. High levels of benzene inhaled by female workers has produced irregular menses, and has been linked to fetal changes and damaged immune and central nervous systems in experimental animals.

The EPA has estimated that the regular drinking of benzene-contaminated water at 10 ppm, or breathing air with 0.4 ppm would account for one added cancer per 100,000 people annually. The EPA also requires the National Response Center to investigate a spill into the environment of 10 pounds or more of benzene.

In August, 2008, the Environmental Health Perspective Journal published the results of a study titled "Childhood Lymphohematopoietic Cancer Incidence and Hazardous Air Pollutants in Southeast Texas, 1995-2004." The investigation found in a review of 997 cases of childhood blood and lymphatic systems cancers that "Census tracts (from Houston, Texas and the surrounding eight counties) with the highest benzene levels had elevated rates of all leukemia(s)." The study's conclusion reads, "Our ecologic analysis suggests an association between childhood leukemia and hazardous air pollution."

Bakeyah Nelson, executive director of Air Alliance in Houston told the Guardian, "It's really a serious public health crisis from pollution and other impacts people are facing. Communities in close proximity to these facilities will get the worst of it, as they get the worst of it on a daily basis. There's also the acute danger of one of these facilities exploding in neighborhoods where storage tanks are adjacent to people's backyards. It's a very real threat and it's a vey precarious situation."

The Guardian quoted Bryan Parras, who grew up in and lives in the low income East End, "These people have very little political power and the city knows it. The real disaster is that they are poisoning these communities slowly, 24-7."

A September 5 New York Times article reported that Arkema Company, the French-owned firm whose plant exploded and burned in Crosby, Texas during Hurricane Harvey, had little in its emergency flood plans for power loss to its cooling equipment for storage of organic peroxides, its main product, sold to plastics manufacturers. Company vice president Gilles Galinier in Crosby insisted, "It is not an industrial accident," instead blaming the severity of the storms, despite the Houston area having experienced so-called 500-year floods each of the last three years. The company worldwide had sales last year of $8.9 billion.

After Hurricane Ike in 2008, Arkema conceded hurricanes and resulting floods were a plant safety issue. But when flood plans were filed with the EPA, there were no provisions for elevating backup generators above the floodwater line. The flooding of emergency generators last month led to the explosions and chemical fires.

At the onset of Harvey, 11 of the 50 Arkema workers in Crosby hurriedly transferred the organic peroxides from the overheated plant building to nine outside refrigerated tanker trucks. The tankers were moved to the highest spot on the Arkema grounds and as far as possible from tanks of sulfur dioxide, a very corrosive gas, and other tanks of isobutylene, a very flammable gas. As it was, all nine tanker trailers and 18 tons of organic peroxides were consumed by fire.

Tom Neltner of the Environmental Defense Fund noted, “They (Arkema) identify new hazards, but don’t change anything in their plans.”

The EPA’s risk management in fact ignores volatile explosive compounds, requiring companies to address risk for 150 identified chemicals selected for flammability and toxicity, but not reactivity. The unstable compound ammonium nitrate is not on the EPA list of monitored chemicals, and caused the 2013 explosion of a fertilizer plant that killed 15 people in the town of West, Texas.

The World Socialist Web Site spoke with a retired oil worker from the ExxonMobil refinery in Beaumont, Texas. “The major refiners are on the Neches River. The Exxon plant in Beaumont and a nearby chemical plant share a water containment facility. I’m sure it overflowed into the river. The public doesn’t hear about runoff and seepage, but the workers in the facility know about oil and processed fluids that are floating underneath us and getting into the ground. You don’t hear about the health of workers either.”

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John upton • 6 hours ago

Anyone who has access to a TV, wherever they live on planet Earth, knows that Florida gets hit by hurricanes.

The petrochemical industry, better than most have vast data banks detailing anthropogenic climate

change: this is why they hand over huge sums of money to the climate deniers, in an attempt to hide the truth and to create confusion and doubt.

And yet virtually nothing is done to prevent carcinogens and other toxins pouring into the water table or escaping and creating extensive atmospheric contamination.

Yet another criminal act whereby profit is put before public health and welfare.

3 • Reply • Share ›

лидия • 8 hours ago

"Significantly, Houston, Texas has never met national air quality standards since the passage of the Clean Air Act of 1970."

USA laws? Toilet paper?

2 • Reply • Share ›

Sebouh80 • 10 hours ago

When giant Petrochemicals dump deadly carcinogens during hurricane Harvey then this basically means they are disregarding the basic material conditions that sustains life on earth.

6 • Reply • Share ›

лидия → Sebouh80 • 8 hours ago

And when(!) big capitalists gave a damn about anything but their profit?

The famous quotation by Marx

"Capital eschews no profit, or very small profit, just as Nature was formerly said to abhor a vacuum. With adequate profit, capital is very bold. A certain 10 percent will ensure its employment anywhere; 20 percent certain will produce eagerness; 50 percent, positive audacity; 100 percent will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300 percent, and there is not a crime at which it will scruple, nor a risk it will not run, even to the chance of its owner being hanged".

6 • Reply • Share ›

Sebouh80 → лидия • 2 hours ago

Lydia, as you well know it was Marx himself who had said in Capital Volume 1 under the topic of primitive accumulation. " 'Accumulate, accumulate! This is Moses and the Prophets!' As you can see the paradox here is that as Capitalists strive to accumulate profits at any cost they are at the same time negating material life on earth. In other words, as Marx had said Capitalists in this regards are simply digging their own graves irrespective of whether they are consciously aware of it or not.

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