U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
Blog Round-up
Prepared by the Office of Public Affairs

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(BNA articles can be viewed online http://Intranet.epa.gov/desktop/news.htm

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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With the internet, blogs, Twitter, forums - people are talking about EPA 24/7
Here's a sampling of what was said on April 29, 2010:

NOTE: To read the entire blog entry, click on underlined URL. To learn more about the blogger, click on the name/link in first line. Notes and headings are from OPA.

Lisa Jackson

EPA Lisa Jackson and author Michael Pollan make the #Time 100 list.
Posted by: pwoodreporter: 4:50 pm Full post: http://tinyurl.com/2fgq3nb

100 "people who most affect our world" includes #EPA head @LisaPJackson:
Posted by: TIME 3:48 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/bA9REs

HuffPost: Frank Sesno: Lisa Jackson and the "Headline People Don't Want to Discuss": Despite the gridlock...
Posted by: iHuffingtonpost: 2:25 pm Full post: http://huff.to/bLX5Zg

Gulf Oil Spill & EPA Response

AP VIDEO: Obama to Use Every Resource to Help Oil Spill
Posted by: AP_Video: 6:50 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/ctKOAI

WSJ: It's a Mess: WH Messaging on Gulf Oil Cleanup
Posted by: http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire 5:25 pm Full post: http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2010/04/29/its-a-mess-white-house-messaging-on-gulf-oil-cleanup/

Obama has dispatched Sec. Napolitano, Sec. Salazar, and EPA admin Jackson to help with attempting to clean up the spill. #gulfoilspill
Posted by: KevinYeaux: 6:50 pm Full post:

WASHINGTON (AP) Obama dispatches EPA, Homeland Security and Interior officials to help with Gulf oil spill.

Posted by: K5ALB: 4:00 pm Full post:

EPA chief Jackson cautions that the oil spill is expected to begin washing up on the Gulf Coast in "the short-term"
Posted by: WestWingReport 1:08 pm Full post:

Chesapeake Bay New Pollution Mapping

Blogged: EPA Uses Maps to Communicate Chesapeake Pollution Enforcement
Posted by: spatialsustain: 7:08 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/cYXU25

EPA unveils Bay Enforcement Database
Posted by: http://weblogs.baltimoresun.com : 1:28 pm Full post:
http://weblogs.baltimoresun.com/features/green/2010/04/epa_unveils_bay_enforcement_da.html

ROUND-UP OF MAJOR BLOGS

AIR

April 30, 2010

Can Global Warming Give Your Kidney Stones? How Will Insurance Companies Deal with Rising Temperatures? (*Huffington Post*)

Kathleen A. McGinty
Posted: April 29, 2010 11:23 AM

First Posted: 04-29-10 04:10 PM | Updated: 04-29-10 04:19 PM
Mother Jones:
It's true that there are many unanswered questions about exactly how rising temperatures will affect human health. But there's mounting evidence that the impact will be significant, according to major research efforts from the Environmental Protection Agency, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the World Health Organization, the National Institutes of Health, and the
The 1995 Chicago heat wave was one of the most brutal weather events the United States has ever experienced. On July 13, the thermostat hit 106 degrees. Many of the city's poor and elderly residents had no air conditioning; many of those who did lost power as blackouts swept the city. Soon, thousands were suffering from dehydration, kidney failure, and respiratory distress. The hospitals were overloaded; the city couldn't cope with the flood of 911 calls. Over the following days, more than 600 people died from heat-related illnesses, with hundreds of bodies temporarily stored in refrigerated meat trucks because the city morgues were full.

The Chicago disaster was the worst heat wave in recent US memory. But if greenhouse gas emissions continue on their current path, health experts say catastrophic heat waves are likely to become far more common. Heat-related deaths in Chicago are expected to quadruple by 2050, up from the current annual average of 182, according to the US Global Change Research Program, a government study. Rising temperatures and accompanying atmospheric changes will alter disease patterns and aggravate all manners of medical conditions, from asthma to respiratory diseases to—believe it or not—kidney stones. In May 2009, the medical journal The Lancet and University College London's Institute for Global Health issued a major report concluding that climate change is the "biggest global health threat of the 21st century."

All of this means new costs for the US health care system—which will almost certainly be passed on to consumers in the form of higher insurance premiums. What is the insurance industry doing to prepare?

So far, not much. In 2008, the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, the group representing state government regulators of property, health, and life insurers, announced that all such companies would be required to report both the risks and opportunities that climate change poses to their businesses. Some were eager to get started. Property insurers, says Joel Ario, chair of NAIC's climate task force, "are probably the only people I know who are more worried about climate change than the environmentalists."

But the health insurers have been resistant. In a survey by NAIC, America's Health Insurance Plans, the industry's powerful lobby group, responded that it "has not adopted specific practices to identify climate change-related risks." It added, "While we continue to monitor climate change as it pertains to the global health care situation there is no conclusive information currently available to address the effects of climate change on health care." The American Council of Life Insurers argued in a letter that "knowledge in this area is not sufficiently developed to warrant an immediate, significant, costly, and possibly damaging change to the content and nature of annual statement reporting." After pushback from the broader insurance industry, NAIC made disclosure voluntary on a state-by-state basis. (Some states intend to move forward with the mandatory disclosure policies as planned.)

It's true that there are many unanswered questions about exactly how rising temperatures will affect human health. But there's mounting evidence that the impact will be significant, according to major research efforts from the Environmental Protection Agency, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the World Health Organization, the National Institutes of Health, and the calls climate change "an environmental health hazard of unprecedented scale and complexity."

Climate change, it turns out, has a few side effects. High temperatures make it harder for the body to cool itself, which can cause heat cramps, exhaustion, and stroke—a particular concern for people with heart conditions. Heat also affects air quality, as stagnant air leads to higher smog concentrations, which in turn places stress on those with respiratory conditions like asthma. Higher levels of carbon dioxide will likely cause pollens to proliferate, while increased humidity will nurture fungal growth—two major aggravators of asthma and allergies. Hotter weather will also lead to the spread of disease. Mosquitoes carrying diseases like malaria, West Nile virus, and dengue fever will migrate into new areas of the US. So will ticks bearing Lyme disease. Water- and food-borne pathogens also thrive in balmier climes.

In some places, winters will be warmer—but that creates problems, too. Increased precipitation is expected to trigger heavier snowfalls and more ice storms, leading to more accidents and falls, says Paul Epstein of the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical

School. A 2009 report from the US Global Change Research Program found that any decrease in hypothermia-related deaths thanks to warmer winters "will be substantially less than the increase in deaths due to summertime heat extremes."

The US health care community is so far behind on the issue of global warming that it's only starting to calculate the cost of these changes. But what little research exists suggests the bill could be big. Lyme disease already costs more than $2.5 billion a year in medical expenses and lost work time—and climate models predict that the area where Lyme-carrying ticks can survive will more than double over the next 70 years. Any increase in asthma would likewise boost the condition's massive price tag—currently $18 billion annually. A study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences found that kidney stones could increase by 30 percent or more in some areas of the US, due to dehydration. That would cost the US health care system more than $1 billion per year.

These are just a few of the anticipated health effects—accumulated, they could pose a major liability for insurers. It's a "time bomb," says Michael Gresty, managing principal of the sustainability consultancy Altanova, which works with corporate clients to reduce risks in this area. "When the industry is not prepared for a sudden shock like this, they either have to dig into their reserves, or they have to increase their premiums to cover the increased costs of providing care."

On the bright side, one underappreciated benefit of tackling climate change is that it could yield major health care savings. The European Environment Agency has found that the European Union's plans to reduce carbon emissions 20 percent by 2020 would cut health costs by $44 billion dollars annually. No equivalent analysis has been done for the US. But a study by the Clean Air Task Force found that shuttering dirty coal plants could save more than twice as many lives as seat belts do each year. Programs to reduce emissions, like providing better public transportation, could also result in indirect health care savings by way of lower obesity rates and fewer respiratory and heart problems. And a January study from the University of Wisconsin found that the benefits of improved air quality that would come from weaning the country off fossil fuels would likely outweigh the short-term costs.

Some insurance firms are beginning to acknowledge that climate change may affect their businesses. In a 2008 submission to the Carbon Disclosure Project—a voluntary program that helps major businesses assess climate change-related risks—Prudential said it had teams examining the implications of increased infectious disease and extreme weather events. The company is also "paying attention more" to markets like Mexico, India, and China, where diseases like malaria may spread, says Mary O'Malley, chair of Prudential's environmental task force. But, she says, Prudential is only starting to evaluate the risks and hasn't made substantial changes to its business model. Likewise, Aetna concluded in a submission to the disclosure project that global warming may lead to "higher health care costs for everyone." But it, too, is in the early stages of assessing the problem.

Smart insurers, says Gresty, should work to calculate climate-related risks and push for policy changes to reduce those risks. "That would be an investment in the future that would be protective of their business," he says. And given the industry's massive lobbying tab, policymakers might well listen. Says Harvard's Epstein, "Through their own policies as well as national policies, the insurers can have a huge voice."

This piece was produced by Mother Jones as part of the Climate Desk collaboration.

Kate Sheppard covers energy and environmental politics in Mother Jones' Washington bureau. For more of her stories, click here. She Tweets here.

Climate Shouldn't Kill Clean Air (*Huffington Post*)

Climate change and energy are in the news as the U.S. Senate, with much political drama, gears up to consider major legislation. In the House passed version and in the Senate draft, many interests - manufacturers, farmers, utilities, and oil and gas companies - were successful in winning desired concessions. Some 'asks' by industry are purely economic, part of the usual legislative give-and-take. Others go to core aspects of environmental law and policy. These requests go too far and should be rejected.

The Clean Air Act has served the country well. First passed in 1970 and signed into law by President Richard Nixon, the Act is testimony to a concern for healthy air shared by Republicans and Democrats alike. In the four decades since, the Act has cleaned up smokestacks, slashed smog and soot, cut acid rain, toxics and hazardous air pollution, held down pollution from cars, trucks and buses, and helped heal the ozone layer. All the while, the Act has supported economic growth in America, both directly as technologies are invented and businesses built to solve pollution problems, and indirectly as Americans live healthier, more productive lives.

Yet, the pending climate bills would strip away key provisions of the Clean Air Act: the EPA is prohibited from ordering greenhouse gas cuts beyond those in the bill. The states too are sidelined at least out until 2017. And a key authority exercised by California to clean up cars is in the balance.

These provisions should be dropped.

Time and again, the Clean Air Act has come to the rescue, moving in lock step with science. Take sooty pollution, for example. The EPA has acted to tighten standards when medical science demonstrated that lung disease and even death were being caused by smaller pollution particles. Businesses say they are concerned about conflicting standards. That's easily resolved by directing the EPA to use only those tools specified by Congress for cutting climate pollution. The Clean Air Act is set up perfectly to work with this kind of directive. Already under the Act, certain kinds of pollutants are identified to be regulated through market mechanisms like trading, while others are handled through technology mandates. The EPA is authorized, and in most instances required, under the Act, regularly to review the standards and update them. In this way the EPA tightens standards to keep pace with science, but the more rigorous standard is a follow on to, not in conflict with, earlier directives.

Keep in mind, too, EPA doesn't have unlimited authority under the Clean Air Act. Once the science defines the problem, costs and technical feasibility are central to deciding the solution. Over the last decade, the states have led the way in devising and implementing strategies to cut greenhouse gases. Their initiatives have worked well in containing pollution and raising revenues to support new clean energy projects that have grown local economies. In the climate bills, these efforts are stopped by Congress. They should not be. Even in these bills, Congress recognizes that state and federal action can co-exist.

Case in point: New federal requirements for the use of renewable energy are called for in the climate legislation -- as a complement to state action, not a replacement. The states are not preempted on renewables and should not be on climate either.

Some Senators also want to strip California of its authority under the Clean Air Act to order cuts in climate pollution caused by cars. This threatens a proven and vital instrument of environmental progress. Vehicle by vehicle, the auto fleet today is remarkably cleaner than ever before. Advances in electric and alternate fuel technology promise even more gains. But the truth is that California has always pushed the progress toward a cleaner fleet. The feds have followed. Climate pollution proves the point: the federal government is acting only now, trailing California by nearly a decade. Bottom line: cars would be dirtier and more inefficient today without California's leadership, and that's what we are in store for in the future if these provisions succeed.

It is important to remember that the pending climate bills represent only a very modest step forward in taking on the climate problem. At 17 percent by 2020, the emission reductions are small compared to the cuts called for by scientists to stabilize the climate, and even then, the generous opportunity provided in the bills to count forest and farmland conservation against pollution reduction requirements means that pollution may be offset rather than actually cut.

Attempting these far reaching rollbacks of long-standing and proven environmental policy is a particularly bad idea in the context of climate change. We know climate change presents greater challenges than any environmental problem confronted to date, imperiling the nation's security and economy as well as public health.

To meet this challenge we should be acting now to reinforce and extend environmental policy tools, not take them away.

Kathleen McGinty was Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality 1993-1998 and Secretary of the PA Dept of Environmental Protection 2003-2008

April 30, 2010
Posted: April 29, 2010 02:26 PM

Lisa Jackson and the “Headline People Don’t Want to Discuss (*Huffington Post*)

Despite the gridlock on a climate bill, the EPA is already authorized to regulate carbon dioxide from cars. And the Obama administration has raised mileage standards so that by 2016, the new car fleet in the US will have to average 35 mpg.

But without a climate bill, it will be a piecemeal approach. And the EPA may be the main arm of the government regulating carbon sources, including power plants and businesses.

With the climate bill in limbo, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson is playing enforcer and reconciler at the same time. We got both at last week's interview with her.

On the one hand, she praises the "heroic efforts" of climate bill sponsors Kerry, Liberman and Graham. But when pressed about a potential gasoline tax, a major part of the bill, she says it's a "headline that people don't want to discuss right now."

What is the administration willing to sacrifice to get a bill? Watch the first section of our live interview with her and find out. See all clips with Lisa Jackson on Planet Forward>>

WATER

Gulf of Mexico: from magnificent resource to industrial sacrifice zone (*GRIST*)

by Tom Philpott
29 Apr 2010 3:20 PM
Fire and a vast oil spill, on top of one of the globe's most productive fisheries. Photo: U.S. Coast Guard
The Gulf of Mexico is a magnificent resource: a kind of natural engine for the production of wild, highly nutritious foodstuff. Here's how the EPA describes it:
Gulf fisheries are some of the most productive in the world. In 2008 according to the National Marine Fisheries Service, the commercial fish and shellfish harvest from the five U.S. Gulf states was estimated to be 1.3 billion pounds valued at $661 million. The Gulf also contains four of the top seven fishing ports in the nation by weight. The Gulf of Mexico has eight of the top twenty fishing ports in the nation by dollar value.

According to the EPA, the Gulf is the home of 59 percent of U.S. oyster production. Nearly three-quarters of wild shrimp harvested in the United States call it home. It is a major breeding ground for some of the globe's most prized and endangered fish, including bluefin tuna, snapper, and grouper.

It would be a wise policy to protect the Gulf, to nurture the health of its ecosytems, to leave it at least as productive as we found it for the next generations. As climate change proceeds apace and population grows, sources of cheap, low-input, top-quality food will be increasingly precious.

So, how are we doing? As I write this, oil is gushing into the Gulf at the rate of 5,000 barrels per day, 5,000 feet below the water's surface, *The New York Times* reports. Above the surface, an oil slick with a circumference of 600 miles is lurching along, lashed by wind toward the coasts.

By Friday, it will have reached Louisiana's wildlife-rich coast. And according to MarketWatch, "Beaches in Alabama and Mississippi are also threatened, and, if the spill spreads into the Gulf's 'Loop Current,' it could devastate coastlines as far away as southeastern Florida."

For fisheries, the situation is atrocious. Direct contact with high oil concentrations kill fish quickly. But low-concentration contact can have horrible impacts, too. According to Greenpeace:

Even when the oil does not kill, it can have more subtle and long-lasting negative effects. For example, it can damage fish eggs, larva and young -- wiping out generations. It also can bio-accumulate up through the food chain as predators (including humans) eat numbers of fish (or other wildlife) that have sub-lethal amounts of oil stored in their bodies.

Tragically, now seems to be a particularly awful time for a massive spill. On the Oceana blog, Matt Niemerski writes:

[S]cientists say this is a critical time for bird life in the region because it is peak nesting and migration time for hundreds of species. Endangered sea turtles are beginning to lay their eggs along beaches in the area and bluefin tuna are spawning right now. Whales, dolphins and sea turtles are also at risk because they could inhale oil when they come to the surface to breathe.

What started with a human tragedy and suspected tragic loss of 11 lives on April 21, now appears to be unfolding into one of the worst environmental disasters in U.S. history.

And that's not all

It should be remembered that oil drilling is not the only human activity that imperils this vital ecosystem. Every year, millions of tons of synthetic nitrogen and mined phosphorous leach from Midwestern farm fields and into streams that drain into the Mississippi. The great river deposits those agrichemicals right into the Gulf, where they feed a 7,000-square-mile algae bloom that sucks up oxygen and snuffs out sea life underneath.

The bulk of this vast Dead Zone's rogue nutrients come from the growing of corn, our nation's largest farm crop. Half of the corn crop ends up in feedlots, feeding cows, chicken, and pigs stuffed together in pollution-spewing, factory-style feedlots.

The federal government has mounted an effort to stem the flow of fertilizer from farms to the Gulf. But policies that encourage maximum production of corn -- including mandates and tax breaks for corn ethanol -- overwhelm those gestures. Thus the Dead Zone has become a routine fact of life in the Gulf, the cost of doing business for a food system

that prizes cheapness and industry profit above all else. As the writer Richard Manning puts it in the winter 2004 *American Scholar* (unavailable online):

Already, the Dead Zone has seriously damaged what was once a productive fishery, meaning that a high-quality source of low-cost protein is being sacrificed so that a source of low-quality, high-input subsidized protein can blanket the Upper Midwest.

The government-generated boom in corn-based ethanol plays its role, too. Five years ago, just 13 percent of the corn crop went into ethanol factories. Today, a third does; by 2015, if government mandates hold, fully one-half will. Already, increased demand from ethanol is taking its toll on the Gulf.

Back in 2008, after ethanol production had soared, the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium reported, "The nitrogen loading to the Gulf of Mexico in May of this year was 37 percent higher than 2007 and the highest since measurements began in 1970." The group added: "The intensive farming of more land, including crops used for biofuels, has definitely contributed to this high nitrogen loading rate."

Thus like the oil spill, the Dead Zone owes some of its existence to our reliance on auto transportation.

At this time of year, fertilizer runoff is streaming into the Gulf, and the algae bloom is just beginning to do its dirty work. Now, adding to the routine depredations of the agricultural runoff, we have what's looking likely to emerge as the nation's largest oil spill ever.

Rather than protect the Gulf, we seem determined to destroy it in pursuit of cheap car fuel and cheap meat. Is it too late to reverse course?