U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
Blog Round-up

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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 Feb. 3, 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.

Coal and EPA Coal Ash Impoundments

TIME magazine: President Obama's clean energy plan, "clean coal" included: not so clean after all? (via TIME)
Posted by: sustainablework 7:00 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/dkBSWo

Send a personal message to OMB to implement harsher regulations on coal ash:
Posted by: BUBeyondCoal 6:46 pm Full post: http://action.sierraclub.org/omb
(Note: In response to the 2008 coal ash disaster in Tenn., the EPA moved quickly to submit draft regulations to WH and OMB for review, but now the coal industry is putting intense pressure on the White House to stop or weaken the rule)

Obama creates clean-coal task force -
Posted by: newswatchoz: 6:10 pm Full post: http://is.gd/7HzLC

W. Virginia governor optimistic after Obama meeting about coal
Posted by: plattspower 6:05 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/coal204

RFS2 Standards

Huffington Post: New Biofuels Strategy and EPA Policy: Promote Clean Energy & Green Jobs
Posted by: Kirbyshrxu 7:02 pm Full post: http://cli.gs/pvTe1

Sugar and Cellulosic Ethanol Stocks

Posted by: CoralLakeBeach 6:50 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/bAgdxH
Note: Green Chip Stocks – "a new way of life – a new generation of wealth")

Obama Reveals Plan for Biofuels, Clean Coal. Includes a carbon capture and storage A-team.
Posted by: heatherfleming 7:00 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/a7xfSC

Gen. Clark applies tough tactics for ethanol industry: Retired Gen. Wesley Clark makes no apologies for leading a ...
Posted by: E2Wire 6:29 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/b2OoMh
(Note: The Hill blog)

NCGA: EPA Regulations Confirm Ethanol's Environmental Superiority Over Gasoline
Posted by: JoeReneeVizi 5:20 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/9R7BTA
(Note: National Corn Growers Association)

No Silver Lining for IL Corn in EPA Clouds
Posted by: agchick 5:52 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/c7pZn6
(Note: EPA published the RFS2 rules as required by the 2007 Energy Independence and Security Act. Corn kernel based ethanol was credited with a 21% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). However, EPA credited ethanol made from corn stover (cobs and stalks) with a 130% reduction in GHG.)

Grist: EPA Disappoints On Ethanol, Clean Coal -
Posted by: grist 6:00 pm Full post: http://tinyurl.com/ycef7ss

ROUND-UP OF MAJOR BLOGS

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate Change Scientific Consensus Cloudy as Ever (*Heritage Foundation*)

Posted By Nick Loris On February 4, 2010 @ 12:55 pm In Energy and Environment

We're a few days before a massive snowstorm whitewashes the District of Columbia, but the Climategate and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change storms are already here and as fierce as ever. Earlier this week, *The Guardian* shed a little more light [2]on the flawed and hidden data from University of East Anglia's Climate Research Unit:

The apparent attempts to cover up problems with temperature data from the Chinese weather stations provide the first link between the email scandal and the UN's embattled climate science body, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, as a paper based on the measurements was used to bolster IPCC statements about rapid global warming in recent decades.

Wang was cleared of scientific fraud by his university, but new information brought to light today indicates at least one senior colleague had serious concerns about the affair. It also emerges that documents which Wang claimed would exonerate him and Jones did not exist.The revelations come at a torrid time for climate science, with the IPPC suffering heavy criticism for its use of information that had not been rigorously checked – in particular a false claim that all Himalayan glaciers could melt by 2035."

The Environmental Protection agency heavily relied on the IPCC report [3]to suggest there was a scientific consensus on global warming. The Himalayan glacier gaffe is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to flaws in the IPCC report. Senior Policy Analyst Ben Lieberman expands [4],

Similar shenanigans appear to have gone on with the IPCC's claim that damage from hurricanes, floods and other natural disasters has worsened because of global warming. Like the Himalayan glacier melt assertion, it was based on the claim of a single researcher who had not published it in the scientific literature, and who now disassociates himself from the way it was used in the IPCC report. Indeed, when he did publish the study, he concluded that there was "insufficient evidence" of a link between warming and natural disaster damage."

Further, the IPCC's assessment of reductions in mountain ice in the Andes, Alps and Africa came from two sources. One was from a magazine [5]that discussed anecdotal evidence from mountain climbers and the other came [5]from a student's dissertation. The student was pursuing a master's equivalent in geography and used interviews with mountain guides for his research.

Some are suggesting the Climategate storm is subsiding with the recent exoneration [6]of Penn State University professor Michael Mann, one of the notorious climate researchers at CSU involved in the email threads. But the university's internal investigation is being called into question by the Commonwealth Foundation who feels an independent investigation [7] would provide more credibility. Chris Horner of the Competitive Enterprise Institute has serious issues [8]with Penn State's initial report of the Mann investigation.

And Congressman Issa (R-CA) is leading a charge [9]to freeze the $500,000 grant in stimulus money Mann received. Don't worry, that money was put to good use. The grant has generated 1.62 jobs [10]. The more pertinent question is: were those jobs saved or created?

We're not sure what's worse: The fact that some Members of Congress want to implement a cap and trade policy based on these reports that would result in [11]$4.6 trillion in higher energy taxes, job losses exceeding 2.5 million and nearly $10 trillion lost in gross domestic product (GDP). Or, the reduction in carbon dioxide from a cap and trade bill (and the economic pain that comes with it) would not make a dent [12]in the earth's temperature. You can decide.

FUEL

Posted: February 4, 2010 06:42 PM

New Biofuels Strategy and EPA Policy: Promote Clean Energy & Green Jobs (*Huffington Post*)

With two important policy announcements, the Obama Administration is putting the nation on track to increase its production and use of clean-burning, American-made biofuels.

That's good news for all Americans who care about protecting the environment, combating climate change, generating good-paying jobs, reviving rural communities, and reducing our dependence on imported petroleum.

With its new biofuels strategy announced February 3, the Administration is right on target in four important ways.

First, the strategy recognizes the importance of setting a bold national goal, similar to President Kennedy's call to put a man on the moon. Thus, the Administration is recommitting the nation to the goal mandated by Congress in the 2007 energy bill - producing and using 36 billion gallons of biofuels by 2022.

Second, the Administration understands that the nation needs every proven or promising biofuels technology, from existing corn ethanol to the newer cellulosic (non-grain-based) technologies and the most visionary "next generation" technologies. New or old, we need them all. Yes, it is

essential that all the newer technologies - from those closest to fruition to those that are still years from commercialization - have every opportunity to succeed.

But the strategy also recognizes that it would be premature to abandon near-commercial technologies, such as cellulosic ethanol, in favor of "drop in" fuels that are still years away. One renewable fuel need not be cannibalized for other technologies to succeed.

Third, the Administration is addressing the concerns about federal loan guarantee programs that are being raised by cellulosic and next generation ethanol technology programs. The national recession and the financial crisis have made it more difficult for every industry, including biofuels, to obtain the capital and credit that are the lifeblood of the economy. The loan guarantee programs must be made to work for cellulosic ethanol producers if this plan is to succeed and its goals to be achieved.

Fourth, this plan rightly recognizes that producing and using American-made biofuels such as ethanol is essential to generating good-paying jobs and taking charge of America's energy future.

The U.S. ethanol industry supports almost 400,000 jobs, providing a strong economic base for many rural communities. According to the 2010 U.S. Ethanol Industry Salary study, nearly 75% of ethanol industry employees earn more than $50,000 a year, and 99% receive healthcare benefits from their employers.

As President Obama understands, supporting the U.S. biofuels industry isn't only good energy policy and good environmental policy. It's also good economic policy, good job-creating policy, good healthcare policy, and good rural development policy.

To add to the good news, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has issued its final rule for implementing the Renewable Fuels Standard that under-girds the national goal of producing and using 36 billion gallons of biofuels.

Among other provisions, the Renewable Fuels Standard will set mandatory blend levels for renewable fuels in all motor fuels. Also, it will create a framework for calculating the carbon reductions achieved by biofuels.

EPA is right when it declares that ethanol from all sources - grain-based, cellulosic, and the newest technologies - provides significant greenhouse gas reductions, compared to gasoline. According to EPA's modeling, corn-based ethanol achieves a 21% greenhouse gas reduction, while cellulosic ethanol achieves a reduction of 73-130%, depending upon feedstock and conversion processes. All these greenhouse gas reductions exceed those mandated by the existing Renewable Fuels Standard.

However, there's still one pitfall in the EPA's modeling. The 21% greenhouse gas reduction results when the unproven idea of "international indirect land use change" is included in the calculation. Without this dubious concept - which holds that the production of corn-based ethanol in the U.S. results in the destruction of rainforests elsewhere in the world - this biofuel would be credited with a 52% greenhouse gas reduction.

Nonetheless, the EPA has developed a workable program that will achieve the fossil fuel replacement goals outlined in the national energy legislation and embraced by the Obama Administration. With public policies moving forward on the right track, America can continue the journey from dirty fossil fuels to cleaner alternative fuels from all sources.

Follow Bob Dinneen on Twitter: www.twitter.com/ethanolbob

TOXICS

Fish for Thought (*Grist*)

Editor's Note: *Anna wrote this post (and several others) before leaving on maternity leave. She gave birth to a healthy baby girl in December.*

To eat fish, or not? If you're pregnant, nursing, or even thinking about becoming pregnant, it's a Catch-22. Seafood is the best possible source of the long-chain omega-3 fatty acid DHA, which is critical for a baby's brain and eye development, both in utero and in the "fourth trimester," while the baby is nursing and the brain is still developing. But there's a catch: seafood contains contaminants that can be harmful to babies—particularly methylmercury, which can harm the developing nervous system, causing subtle deficits in language, memory, motor skills, perception, and behavior.

So for a pregnant woman, the decision whether to eat fish is now freighted with consequences. Eat fish, and you're putting your baby's brain at risk of from toxic contaminants. Skip fish, and you're denying your baby's brain of crucial nourishment.

Pregnant and nursing women never asked to make this choice.

Mercury is everywhere, even in the air we breathe. It comes from a variety of sources, but the largest in the US are coal-fired power plants, which exhale elemental mercury in the fumes of coal smoke. The mercury drifts around on air currents, and eventually settles into water bodies, where bacteria convert it into a far more troublesome form called methylmercury. Methylmercury binds to protein, and accumulates in every-higher concentrations at every step of the food chain. It's poison. It hurts babies' brains. All fish contain some methylmercury, and some fish species contain enough that doctors recommend that expectant mothers avoid eating them completely.

And that's a shame, since there's s no better source of DHAs than fish. DHAs build brain connectors while a baby's body is developing in the womb.

So, there, in a nutshell, is the dilemma. As a community, we've allowed one of the most healthful foods for pregnant mothers to become contaminated with a compound that can

harm developing babies' nervous systems. We've given polluters free rein; but left the tough choices to women, and the hardships to the children they bring into the world.

What's the right choice for an expecting mother? Well, as a fisherman's daughter, a former Puget Sound gillnetter myself, and proud resident of "Salmon Nation," I believe in the power of fish—particularly salmon—as a super food. And the more I read, the more I believe it's also super brain food. My favorite book about nutrition during pregnancy and early childhood, Nina Planck's *Real Food for Mother and Baby*, goes so far as to say that your baby's brain is "made of fish."

But that decision—"Yes, I'll eat fish"—prompts one question more: How much fish is safe?

Well, it depends on the type of fish. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officially advise women who "may become pregnant, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children" to limit consumption certain fish and shellfish to 12 ounces a week, and to avoid shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and Tilefish completely. (Drat—I've always loved swordfish!) EPA says that, and I quote: *"By following these recommendations for selecting and eating fish or shellfish, women and young children will receive the benefits of eating fish and shellfish and be confident that they have reduced their exposure to the harmful effects of mercury."* In addiiton, each state has its own advisories about fish consumption as well.

Generally speaking, the fish to avoid are large predators. Peak predators act as concentrators for bioaccumulative toxics: their bodies absorb the methylmercury from their prey, which, in turn, have absorbed methylmercury from living things lower on the food chain. And the bigger the predator fish, the more fish it eats. Larger fish also tend to live longer than smaller fish, so there's simply more time for mercury to build up in their bodies.

But just as some fish contain high levels of mercury, others contain less. Five of the most commonly eaten fish that are considered "low in mercury" are shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock, and catfish. Albacore ("white") tuna, another commonly eaten fish, has more mercury than canned light tuna. So when choosing your two meals of fish and shellfish per week, the EPA/FDA recommendations suggest you limit yourself to up to 6 ounces (one average meal) of albacore tuna per week.

But how confident can you be, *really*, that fish are actually a healthy, safe food for you and your kids?

Studies are mixed. Planck points to a few that indicate more fish is better. In 2005, researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health announced that the government mercury warnings could cause pregnant women to eat too little fish to nourish her baby's brain. In 2007, Joseph Hibbeln, an expert on omega-3 fats at the National Institutes of Health, published a study of more than eleven thousand pregnant women near Bristol, England. The women consumed varying degrees of seafood each week:

none at all, around the recommended portions, or more than 12 ounces (at least 3 servings a week.) Researchers later assessed the women's children, aged six months to eight years, for various measures of mental and social development. Even after accounting for about two dozen confounding factors—social disadvantage, perinatal health, diet, etc.—*the children of women eating less than two servings of fish per week had lower verbal, fine motor, and social skills than the children of the fish-eating mothers*. The lower the seafood intake, the higher the chances of poor development. Some health researchers have even begun to wonder whether fish oils might even protect against toxic methylmercury.

Biologist Sandra Steingraber in her book *Having Faith, An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood*, on the other hand, cites a bunch of studies that strike fear in any mother-to-be. A study in the Faroe Islands, for example, carried out by Danish researcher Philippe Grandjean, looked at 1,022 babies born in 1986-87 to women who ate fish and high-mercury content whale meat while pregnant. When they were seven years old, the children were evaluated on their cognitive and motor skills. The results were sobering. Deficiencies were found in memory, learning and attention that were proportional to the level of mercury that had been recorded in their umbilical cord blood and maternal hair. "These children were not actually sick. They were just slower in solving riddles and other puzzles." In the 1970s, a group of mothers in Iraq unknowingly ate flour milled from mercury-dressed wheat. At high concentration levels of mercury, their children developed progressive retardation and paralysis.

In 2000, the National Academy of Sciences released a report that concluded that each year in the United States, as many as 60,000 children are born at risk for neurodevelopmental problems owing to prenatal exposure to mercury—these are kids that the report described as "struggling to keep up in school and who might require remedial classes or special education."

Steingraber points out that "Big Fish"—fisheries industry lobbies equivalent to "Big Oil"—have stood side-by-side with utility companies to fight tighter standards for mercury. If this kind of pressure wins out, it means that levels of the metal could keep rising to the point where the choice would be all too clear: forego brain-nurturing fish altogether. (As I mentioned recently, the US has taken some baby steps towards curbing mercury pollution.)

In my own deliberations, I've erred on the side of fish. Seafood is simply the best way to get the DHA my baby needs. Salmon is among the safer seafood choices and it's a personal favorite. A 3.5-ounce portion of wild sockeye salmon contains more than 1,200 milligrams of omega-3 fats—and it's a yummy delivery system. I've eaten it a couple times a week during my pregnancy and now that I'm in the heavy-duty brain-development stage (third trimester), I'm trying to eat even more. And even though every bite (while delicious) reminds me of the serious consequences I'm toying with, I will continue to do so when I start breastfeeding.

That's the gamble I'm taking with my own baby. I'll also continue to work toward climate and energy policy that frees us from the shackles of dirty energy—because the pollution from coal plants not only threatens the climate, but byproducts like mercury are also hurting all our kids.

What's your fish story? Did you eat fish during pregnancy? And how did you sort out all the conflicting information? What can moms do to insist on better standards for mercury pollution?

Images courtesy: JG in SF and Manuel W, Flickr.com.

This post originally appeared at Sightline's Daily Score blog.

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