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

Friday, February 15, 2013

Table of Contents

Blog Round-up
Monday, July 26, 2010

ROUND-UP OF MAJOR BLOGS 2
BP SPILL 2
Along Gulf Coast, BP Spill Vapors Could Be Up Your Nose & On Your Head (*Treehugger*) 2
Pennsylvania Land Owners Take 20 Million Dollar Bite Out Of The Fracing (*Treehugger*) 3
BP Not paying funds into Spill Escrow Account (*DAILY KOS*) 4
CLIMATE CHANGE 6
Setting a Price on Carbon Will Help US End Oil Addiction - Not Just Combat Climate Change (*Treehugger*) 6
Bill Scher: "This Thing Is Not Over": There Always Has Been a Plan B For The Climate Bill (*Huffington Post*) 8
Why Climate Change Legislation is NOT Dead Folks! (*DAILY KOS*) 9
ENERGY 10
Weekly Mulch: How Reid's Energy Bill Undermines Senate Climate Efforts (*Huffington Post*) 10
Reid puts Energy Bill on Ice: with a Chilling Effect on Wind and Solar? (*DAILY KOS*) 13
Senate energy package: Wait, it gets worse! (*Grist*) 17
PESTICIDES 18
Environmental Groups Sue USEPA Over Insecticide (*Treehugger*) 18
WATER 19
In midst of river cleanup, supporters are divided (*Huffington Post*) 19
Cargill's Plans to Pave Over Wetlands Gets Residents Riled (*Treehugger*) 21

ROUND-UP OF MAJOR BLOGS

BP SPILL

Along Gulf Coast, BP Spill Vapors Could Be Up Your Nose & On Your Head (*Treehugger*)

Sunday, July 25, 2010
Particulate matter associated air quality at USEPA sampling stations along US Gulf Coast - snapshot indication. Image credit:AirNow, Gulf of Mexico Air Quality

This summer has seen huge amounts of volatile or "low boiling" petroleum fractions released into the Gulf of Mexico, including dispersants. These 'volatiles' are aromatic (strong smelling), and rapidly evaporate when warm. Evaporation can take place directly from sea water. Once in the air, volatiles can react to form photochemical smog, which contains ozone. Ground-level zone is known for irritating bronchial tubes and eyes, and for causing leaves to hang wilted and deathly looking, shortly after sunrise when concentrations are typically the worst. Combine ozone and un-degraded volatile aromatics in the air and you get a mess of unpleasantness. Note: burning oil on water doesn't make all the volatiles go away. The fire forms particulates and carries unburned components up into the clouds, and down again with the rain (hence the 'on your head' part of the headline).

I've been wondering when someone in authority would acknowledge the spill-associated air quality issues, or if we have to wait for cable news to document symptoms. Looks like both are happening at once. See some explanations below.

From Christian Science Monitor, the paper no longer printed on paper: Last week, the EPA said that residents of two hard hit coastal communities in Louisiana - Grand Isle and Venice - face a "moderate health risk" due to hydrocarbon fumes. In Terrebonne Parish, residents of the town of Cocodrie and the surrounding area are also reporting strong odors of petroleum.

For months since BP's Deepwater Horizon oil well blew, residents along the Gulf Coast, including many in New Orleans and other metro regions miles away from the shore, have said they smell fumes from the oil spill. Some have reported symptoms ranging from red eyes and runny noses to sinus infections and flu-like symptoms.

Conservation of matter frames this issue. Petroleum volatiles can only go so many ways, initially. The major, initial steps toward where volatiles end up include:

Dissolving in sea water.

Becoming attached to, or dissolved in, organic matter within the sea (things living and dead)

Biodegrading after processes #1 or #2 occur, as above.

Evaporating directly into the air, from the air/sea interface.

Carried with sea water aerosols formed by wind and waves, and evaporating as the aerosols evaporate.

Lapping up on hot beaches with the waves, and evaporating at a higher rate in contact with the warm beach sand and other objects.

Forming photochemical smog, and partially degrading during that process

On putting the micrometer on a volatiles fog bank.

Take note of how far, in the above graphic, air quality sampling stations are shown to be from the actual coast line. The sampling respults poorly represent conditions where the oil meets land.

Sure, agencies can send out industrial hygiene techs to pull air samples using equipment designed for fairly steady state industrial situations. Unfortunately, nature does not operate at the convenience of Dreaeger Tube sampling devices. Hot scum and blobs lapping up on a beach, an on shore wind diverted skyward as the sun warms the shore, atmospheric stratification, and all those other things that can't be controlled make snapshot surveys of questionable value for understanding the hazard and the smell.

Exposure is down.

If well-to-do beach home owners and tourists and vacationers were lining the shores as usual, I bet there would be a lot more symptomatic complaints and grumbling property owners.

Pennsylvania Land Owners Take 20 Million Dollar Bite Out Of The Fracing (*Treehugger*)

"A natural gas rig in southwestern Pennsylvania." Image credit:, via Andrew Harrer/Bloomberg News
The Pennsylvania natural gas 'fracing' royalty settlement described in the post headline is explained concisely in this opener from the coverage: "Some 2,000 landowners in Pennsylvania will receive a share of $1.75 million and could get as much as $20 million over the next few years as part of the settlement of a federal class-action suit against a Texas-based gas company drilling in the Marcellus Shale." Note: the settlement story isn't about pollution damages; it's about making sure royalties due were properly paid out...as discussed below. But, there are two trains running; and neither of them are headed in the direction of Cheap Gas.

Two trains running. America has two choices if they go the Picken's Plan route of substituting increased reliance on natural gas as a replacement for gasoline and coal. Choice one is to suck from the Marcellus Shale trillions of BTU per year worth of additional natural gas, pushing both

the royalties and the (d) adverse environmental impacts of this development off on rural landowners, leaving those far inland from Northeastern coastal cities to construct a reasonable regulatory regime and balance sheet.

Note, for perspective: New York Citys' annual natural gas consumption is roughly equivalent to 1/6th of the potential of the Marcellus Shale to provide natural gas every year.

Choice two is to import liquid petroleum gas (LNG) from over seas, into coastal ports for US distribution. It woudl come from places where they would otherwise just flare it or make plastic from it: Nigeria, and Saudi Arabia, respectively, are exhibits A and B of these behaviors.

However, because citizens of the harbor cities want nothing at all to do with LNG in their ports - guess what? Marcellus Shale is the only game in play at the energy casino.

As illustrated by the opening paragraphs of this post, the wildcatting days of Marcellus Shale development are over. Signing up landowners naive about mineral extraction rights, sloppy waste management practices...all that stuff...are so yesterday, so Bush League. Things are about to change.

BP has cast the role and set expectations for Marcellus Shale operations as well as deepwater drilling. Landowners above the Marcellus Shale see how the Gulf Coast fisher-folk and rig operators were treated by the petro business. They have all heard Tony Hayward say he's wanting 'his life back.' And. they saw how disinterested BP's suppliers were in product stewardship, withholding dispersant ingredient information. A few months of that noise is enough to drive home the I'm gonna get mine while they're getting theirs' outlook toward drilling.

USEPA is on a listening tour to determine how and to what extent the risks and benefits of hydraulic "fracing" needs to be scientifically studied and regulated. has covered the EPA listening tour and here are a few seminal snippets from their reporting, illustrating the risk communication credibility block: With the steep environmental costs of fossil fuel extraction apparent on beaches from Texas to Florida -- and revelations that industry shortcuts and regulatory negligence may have contributed to the BP catastrophe in the gulf -- gas prospectors are finding a cold reception for their assertions that their drilling practices are safe...Matt Pitzarella, a spokesman for Range Resources, a Texas-based natural gas producer, acknowledged that the gulf spill had increased public concern about any sort of drilling activity.

BP Not paying funds into Spill Escrow Account (*DAILY KOS*)

Sunday, July 25, 2010
Ken Fienberg on both CBS and CNN via Crooks and Liars where he talks up the current "success" of the program.

Despite all of Feinberg's happy talk above the Press-Register has revealed this.

BAYOU LA BATRE, Ala. -- Ken Feinberg said today he hasn't been able to start writing claims checks because BP PLC has not yet deposited any money into the $20 billion escrow fund it promised to create.

Feinberg, who was appointed last month to administer individual and business claims stemming from the oil spill, held an early morning town hall meeting in Bayou La Batre on Saturday before meeting with the Press-Register editorial board in downtown Mobile.

Feinberg said he is leaning toward giving partial payments to companies and people who are indirectly impacted by the spill -- an outlet store in Foley hurt by the decline in beach traffic, for example.

He also said he would do something for real estate owners to cover a decrease in property value.

BP officials and President Barack Obama agreed last month that the oil company would put $5 billion a year over the next four years into an account to pay for spill-related costs, such as claims, environmental restoration and cleanup costs.

This might just be a bureaucratic snafu, and in the long run may not be a big deal, but when we also look at how BP has treated local Scientist and experts by trying to legally shut them up about what the ecological and environment impacts of the spill has really been...

BP PLC attempted to hire the entire marine sciences department at one Alabama university, according to scientists involved in discussions with the company's lawyers. The university declined because of confidentiality restrictions that the company sought on any research.

add to this the very clear fact that clean up workers in the Gulf are still not using Reperators - (after some were threatened with being fired if they brought their own) this latest bit of information seems more like a pattern than an aberration.

Hugh Kaufman just messaged Crooks and Liars the following, along with a link to the video below:

CNN may not know what they have documented. Will anybody tell them? Will they figure it out? ...

CNN documents, on this documentary airing tonight and tomorrow, that the “air smell's [sic] bad” (it's full of carcinogenic and other hazardous material in oil and dispersants). None of the cleanup workers are wearing respirators and nobody is testing the air.

Just like 911 WTC, these workers are gonna be in trouble 5, 10, and 20 years down the line.

Where is EPA and OSHA?

Yeah, good question - they've been MIA for quite some time.

Despite the current Right-Wing Meme that "Obama has been to MEAN to Business, and has scared them to too much change", the fact is that he's actually been pretty toothless in regards to BP.

If anything U.S. Officials have been flacking for BP, not keeping their "Boot on their Neck".

And they're certainly not getting in the way while BP hires Prison Labor - working them for up to 12 Hrs a day, 6 hours a day, in 100 degree plus toxic environment.

Work crews in Grand Isle, Louisiana, still stand out. In a region where nine out of ten residents are white, the cleanup workers are almost exclusively African-American men. The racialized nature of the cleanup is so conspicuous that Ben Jealous, the president of the NAACP, sent a public letter to BP CEO Tony Hayward on July 9, demanding to know why black people were over-represented in "the most physically difficult, lowest paying jobs, with the most significant exposure to toxins."

Hiring prison labor is more than a way for BP to save money while cleaning up the biggest oil spill in history. By tapping into the inmate workforce, the company and its subcontractors get workers who are not only cheap but easily silenced—and they get lucrative tax write-offs in the process.

Work release inmates are required to work for up to twelve hours a day, six days a week, sometimes averaging seventy-two hours per week. These are long hours for performing what may arguably be the most toxic job in America. Although the dangers of mixed oil and dispersant exposure are largely unknown, the chemicals in crude oil can damage every system in the body, as well as cell structures and DNA.

Did someone say Slavery was over? Fact is - it's not, particularly if you read all of the 13th Amendment which has an bright bold exception for the "Duly Convicted".

The Oil Spill itself may be stopped for now, but it's long term environmental and health impact remains a giant dark cloud looming just under the surface of our full comprehension, one that is likely to continue taking it's toll - for generations.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Setting a Price on Carbon Will Help US End Oil Addiction - Not Just Combat Climate Change (*Treehugger*)

Sunday, July 25, 2010
There's lots of overlap between ending our oil addiction in the United States and combatting climate change, with setting a price on carbon (regardless of the mechanism used, be it cap and

trade, a carbon tax, or something else) mostly being cast as being a solution for reducing the impacts of global warming. This is certainly true, but it also could go a long way towards reducing our oil usage as well.

Perhaps its hugely obvious to say, but I'll still say it again. When burned in an internal combustion engine, gasoline and diesel fuel emits lots of carbon into the atmosphere--19.4 pounds of CO2 per gallon of gasoline and 22.2 pounds per gallon for diesel fuel in fact, according to the official EPA stats.

Externalizing Pollution Costs Means We All Pay For Them

To refresh your Economics 101 terminology, those carbon emissions (and the other air pollutants released from burning gasoline) are a negative environmental externality. In other words, they are quantifiable financial costs associated with the purchase and use of gasoline which aren't incorporated into the price consumers pay.

In fact, those not-included (externalized) costs are an economic burden upon society because of the myriad impacts that unchecked carbon emissions are creating, directly and indirectly, in terms of rising global temperatures, ocean acidification, spreading tropical disease, decreased crop yields leading to more hunger and poverty, et cetera, et cetera--TreeHugger has documented all of these and the associated environmental degradation

The externalized costs of pollution, when it comes to greenhouse gas emissions at least, can affect people literally on the other side of the world from where the polluting product is produced or consumed--with in many cases those people least able to adapt being the greatest affected. Indonesian farmer, photo: Danumurthi Mahendra via flickr.

Consumers Have Inaccurate, Incomplete Information

Not including these costs in the price consumers pay also creates a situation of imperfect information being made available to purchasers. In other words, the price paid does accurately represent the true cost of the good. By pushing part of the true cost of oil off to society as a whole (externalizing it) you've created a market failure that needs to be rectified if the entire market system enterprise is to work.

This is where setting a price on carbon comes in. Whether established as a carbon tax or through a carbon trading system, this price on carbon will, yes, increase the cost of gasoline, diesel, and all the other uses for oil.

Price Pollution & the Economy Will Adjust to Be Less Polluting

To an oil addicted society this may seem like self-imposed pain--admittedly there will be an adjustment period to go through (if certainly not one which can't be managed)--but it is both good and necessary for both the economy and the environment.

From a theoretical perspective, incorporating the cost of carbon pollution into the price consumers pay for products derived from oil gives them fuller information, which allows the free market to function more efficiently--and there's nothing most economists like better than a well functioning market.

From a practical perspective, raising the price of goods made from oil brings the comparative cost of them more accurately in line with those made from non-polluting materials, which are often now more expensive because of the de facto subsidy petroleum and other fossil fuels currently receive.

Effects Will Go Well Beyond Which Goods We Buy

This in turn will gradually shift consumer spending, habit and preference towards goods which are made from materials with no or lower carbon emissions. It will encourage city and town planning towards patterns which support more walkable and bikeable communities. It will encourage both public and private transit to be powered by low-carbon sources of energy. It will encourage long-distance shipping to be done similarly, in turn likely stimulating more localized and regionalized economies--with long distance shipping occurring only for those goods which either can only be produced in certain locations due to geography or where, even including the cost of transport, some competitive advantage still keeps costs lower.

Oil (and other fossil fuels) may well still be used for some products and applications once the now-externalized cost of carbon emissions are included in the price, if there simply isn't another good option for the task at hand, but the price of those products will more accurately reflect the environmental cost of doing so and their use likely curbed substantially.

The economy will adjust to the new conditions, adapting and innovating products because of the new pricing. The balance of jobs will shift, with jobs being lost in production of fossil fuels and new ones created in other areas, balancing them. Just like the environment adapting to changes, the economy will as well. And at least one aspect of humanity's impact on the planet upon which we, and the economy, utterly depend will be lowered.

Bill Scher: "This Thing Is Not Over": There Always Has Been a Plan B For The Climate Bill (*Huffington Post*)

At Netroots Nation today, Van Jones sought to rally attendees after the Senate leadership put plans for a climate protection bill on the back burner : "This thing is not over."

He's right, for one very simple reason. It is against the law under the Clean Air Act, the Supreme Court has ruled, for the Environmental Protection Agency to ignore greenhouse gas pollution. And a congressional attempt to gut the Clean Air Act and block the EPA from acting was defeated this year.

That fact has always been part of the argument to press Senators from coal, oil, manufacturing and agribusiness states to accept climate compromises: if Congress doesn't do it, the EPA will.

And that same fact has always the Obama administration's Plan B.

The EPA is not going to announce an economy-wide carbon cap overnight. But it has been and will continue to announce a rule here and a rule there, continually ramping up pressure on Congress to pass legislation that will cap carbon emissions in a way that businesses will find more flexible than what the EPA is able to do.

This is part of the reason prospects for a climate bill have remained alive far longer than anyone would have thought considering how far away we are from 60 Senate votes. Even businesses know what is around the corner.

And more and more are willing, if not eager, to cut a deal today to establish certainty on greenhouse gas regulation over the next four decades, instead of trying to tie up new EPA rules in court, which - as the recent Court ruling showed -- can't work forever.

The question of a climate bill is when, not if.

But since the climate crisis has its own clock, it's our job to fight as hard as possible to make the "when" as soon as possible.

Why Climate Change Legislation is NOT Dead Folks! (*DAILY KOS*)

Sunday, July 25, 2010
Something is going to happen in 2011 that is going to FORCE the Congress to put a price on carbon and that is that the EPA is going to regulate the HELL out of CO2.

As a result, I wouldn't be surprised if indeed a climate legislation bill will be passed in the lameduck Congressional session because the business community fears the EPA's regulation MORE than a price on carbon.

The Supreme Court ruled 3 years ago that carbon dioxide can be considered a pollutant and can be regulated. In 2011 the EPA is expected to regulate the HELL out of carbon dioxide which will force the business community to make a choice: endure STIFF regulations or make put carbon pricing on the market.

Joe Klein at Time makes this point.

There Will Be An Energy Bill...soon.
Why? Because there is a Supreme Court ruling, now three years old, that carbon dioxide is a poison that needs to be cleaned up. Next year, the Environmental Protection Agency will begin regulating the hell out of Co2. The business community won't like that, nor will many Republicans.

Many Senators realize this.

Maria Cantwell:
"Putting a price on carbon is the only alternative," says Senator Maria Cantwell, who has offered a bill--with Maine Republican Susan Collins as co-sponsor--that would force the 2000 top polluters to participate in an auction to purchase the right to spew; 75% of the income would be returned as a "dividend" to taxpayers, the other 25% would go to alternative energy. "There's no question that we will have a bill before the EPA regulations kick in."

Lindsey Graham:
(Senator Lindsey Graham told me something very similar a few months ago and said he was certain that more than a few of his Republican colleagues would vote for putting a price on carbon.)

I personally think that too many Conservadems are running scared before the midterm elections to go on record this year. However, the prospect of the EPA regulations in 2011 will FORCE both moderate Dems and moderate Repubs to put a price on carbon because the business community will push them in the end.

Joe Klein's thoughts on the failure (so far) of passing climate legislation in 2010.
And so, yesterday's death of environmental legislation should be considered a pre-election maneuver. Given a choice between taxes and potentially punitive regulations, the wise--the more elegant; the less expensive--choice is a tax every time. (Which is why I'm disappointed that there wasn't a tax on toxic financial-derivative trading in the Financial Reform bill.) It is an essential conservative principle: you tax the things you want to discourage. Pollution is certainly one; dependence on foreign fossil fuels is another--and that's why I hope the next iteration of energy legislation is called: The National Defense Conservation Act.

Even if a climate change bill with a price on carbon some how does not pass in 2010 or 2011, the EPA will see to it that the United States will be FORCED to go the clean energy route because carbon will be so heavily regulated.

FOLKS, THE GREEN ECONOMY IS COMING..

ENERGY

July 26, 2010

Weekly Mulch: How Reid's Energy Bill Undermines Senate Climate Efforts (*Huffington Post*)

diggfacebook Twitter stumble reddit del.ico.us

Read More: Carteret Islands , Clean Energy , Energy Bill , Gasland , Grittv , Harry Reid , Hydrofracking , Hydrofracture , Jobs , Jobs Bill , Linktv , Mother Jones , New Guinea , Renewable Energy , The Progressive , Truthout , Washington Independent , News
by Sarah Laskow, Media Consortium blogger

Yesterday, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) introduced a limited energy bill that responds to the oil spill and promotes energy efficiency. Reid's action is a signal that the Senate will not pass climate legislation before November, although Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) said that a climate bill could come up in the lame-duck session following the election.

"The Senate's climate bill is officially dead," Kate Sheppard writes at Mother Jones. "And given that Democrats will almost certainly hold fewer seats in Congress next year, major action on the climate is unlikely to be revived anytime soon."

Since 2009, expectations for a bill regulating carbon emissions have steadily declined. After this latest failure in the Senate, the best near-term hope for addressing climate change comes from the Environmental Protection Agency, which still has the power to regulate carbon emissions.

At the Washington Independent, Andrew Restuccia reports that Sen. Reid's bill will likely hold oil companies more financially accountable for spills by lifting the cap on their liability for economic damages and will nudge homeowners towards energy efficiency.

But, Restuccia writes, a sources tells him that "significantly...the bill might not include a renewable energy standard." Such a standard would require an increasing percentage of the country's electricity to come from sources like wind and solar.

The energy bill could create jobs

Sen. Reid has often emphasized that an energy bill is also a jobs bill: Innovation in the clean energy sector creates employment opportunities at a time when they're sorely needed. Dropping the renewable energy standard could also mean diminishing the potential for job creation.

Public News Service reports that in rural areas, a standard could create thousands of jobs.

"The Department of Energy says, if we get to 20 percent of the nation's electricity from wind by the year 2030"--one of the less ambitious standards proposed--"it would mean 3,000 to 4,000 new jobs in most of our states," Chuck Hassebrook, executive director of the Center for Rural Affairs, said. "There's not a lot of things out there bringing that kind of new economic opportunity to rural America, so it could be a great thing for us."

The Gulf Coast connection
The need for job opportunities extends beyond rural areas. In the Gulf Coast, for instance, even fishermen left idle by the oil spill are hoping the oil industry resumes drilling soon. Their communities need those jobs. As Jerome Ringo, who worked for two decades in the oil industry, writes at The Progressive, "With unemployment still in the double digits across the nation, and

the people on the Gulf Coast struggling to survive, we need far more clean energy job growth than what we're seeing right now."

That's not going to happen without a long-term commitment to clean energy from the government, Ringo argues. "Businesses need this signal to know how to invest, and, with this signal, they will move in a direction that creates many more jobs in areas like renewable energy and electric cars for people like me who once worked in oil and gas."

Climate refugees

That transition won't happen overnight, but it's important to start in that direction as soon as possible. In the United States, the effects of climate change are affecting people--farmers dealing with strange weather, for instance--but the impact is not obvious in the every day lives of Americans.

Not everyone has that luxury, though. LinkTV's Earth Focus reports on the plight of climate refuges in New Guinea. In a new film, Jennifer Redfearn documents the story of the country's Carteret Islanders--the first group to organize a community-wide evacuation of their home in the face of climate change. As the sea level rises around their island, storm surges increase and fresh water becomes salty. Carteret Islanders are looking to move to Bougainville, a neighboring island recovering from civil war.

"I've heard about you Carterets. You are an easy-going people," one leader tells them. "Here it is totally different."

The longer Americans wait to start scaling back our energy use, the more people around the globe will be displaced.

Hydrofracking

When moving towards clean energy, however, it is important that leaders in Washington and on the state level watch emerging energy companies closely. For instance, The New York Times reports that Reid's bill will promote natural gas production. But as natural gas grows more popular as a bridge fuel, communities and legislators are discovering more dangerous environmental impacts from the hydrofracture drilling process that companies use to extract the gas from shale deposits.

Josh Fox's recent documentary, Gasland, showed that residents across the country in fracking areas have had their drinking water contaminated. The natural gas industry is pushing back hard against the claims his film makes. Truthout reports that "Energy In Depth (EID), an information service created and funded by the oil and gas industry, recently posted 'Debunking Gasland,' a point-by-point argument against the Fox's startling discoveries. EID paints Fox as a 'purveyor of the avant-garde' who is guilty of 'flat-out making stuff up.'"

Fox isn't the only one to voice concerns about water quality, either. GritTV recently heard from residents in the Delaware River Basin about their concerns. "No water for gas" is their rallying cry.

Water, water, everywhere

Fox is fighting back, but the response to his film shows that the industry is ready to push back against any criticisms of its practices. It has also resisted effects by regulators to require disclose of the chemicals it uses in its extraction process.

But as the Washington Independent's Restuccia reports, "Momentum is building in the House to pass new regulations on the controversial practice of hydraulic fracturing, in which water, sand and a mixture of potentially harmful chemicals are injected into the ground in order to gain access to natural gas."

Unfortunately, if the fate of the climate bill is any indication, any environmental legislation, even with momentum, has little chance of moving through Congress right now.

This post features links to the best independent, progressive reporting about the environment by members of The Media Consortium. It is free to reprint. Visit the Mulch for a complete list of articles on environmental issues, or follow us on Twitter. And for the best progressive reporting on critical economy, health care and immigration issues, check out The Audit, The Pulse, and The Diaspora. This is a project of The Media Consortium, a network of leading independent media outlets.

Reid puts Energy Bill on Ice: with a Chilling Effect on Wind and Solar? (*DAILY KOS*)

News OCR Text: The Energy Bill has been shelved for now -- another Price exacted by the Do Nothing Party.

Senate Halts Effort to Cap CO2 Emissions

Democrats Forgo Centerpiece of President Obama's Energy Plan, as Cap-and-Trade Fails to Lure Broad Support in Congress

Mr. Reid refused to declare the idea dead. But Thursday's decision called into question when or whether any legislated cap on greenhouse-gas emissions would reach Mr. Obama's desk.

Now, businesses, such as wind-turbine makers, that had bet on a greenhouse-gas provision to make alternatives to coal and oil more cost-competitive must recalculate how long it might take for that to happen.

[...] the solar industry is growing at the rate of about 40% a year in terms of electrical power installed and is likely to continue to grow, said Ron Kenedi, vice president of Sharp Corp.'s Sharp Solar Energy Solutions Group in Huntington Beach, Calif.

We need some new Senators (at least 60), who actually care about Energy Independence -- enough to act.

How are Clean Energy companies ever to get a serious foothold, when the trail ahead, keeps disappearing from legislative washouts?

Flag on the play, Halt all Forward Progress ... It's the 80's all over again, with the Clean Energy demand being undercut at every turn.

Clean Energy? ... Who Needs it?

[Senate Democratic leaders Thursday shelved their effort to cap greenhouse-gas emissions as part of a broad energy bill, putting aside indefinitely a centerpiece of President Barack Obama's ambitious effort to transform the way Americans produce and consume energy.

The proposal would have allowed utilities to trade permits to pollute as they worked to shift away from coal—a concept commonly called "cap and trade."

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said Thursday that neither he nor the White House had managed to line up 60 senators to support even a limited proposal seeking to cap carbon-dioxide emissions from electric power companies.

Mr. Reid's decision to pull cap-and-trade from the energy bill could reverberate on Wall Street, where banks and brokerage firms had been anticipating climate legislation that would lead to widespread trading of carbon "credits."

There is already a global carbo-trading market, with the majority of the trading taking place in the regulated European markets. It amounted to $127 billion last year.

But other business could be chilled if Washington abandons entirely the idea of raising the price of consuming fossil fuels. Companies trying to develop and sell solar and wind energy technology, energy-conservation systems or electric vehicles have hoped that caps on greenhouse gas emissions would jump-start demand.

Mr. Reid's decision leaves EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson in charge of setting federal limits on greenhouse gases. She has already adopted rules limiting emissions from cars and requiring state regulators to account for such emissions when they issue air-quality permits to large refineries and manufacturing facilities.

The agency's authority to do so is under assault. Business groups have sued, challenging the legality of EPA proposals to regulate greenhouse-gas emissions.

Leave it to the EPA to prime the Clean Energy pump ?

Even when Wall Street is chomping on the bit, to get first crack at the US Carbon Credit Market?

I thought the EPA and CO2 Regulation Issue -- was already a "done deal". Something about the Supreme Court ruling CO2 ACTUALLY IS a harmful Pollutant ... and that was in the W-Decade, too ...

EPA: Greenhouse Gases Threaten Public Health and the Environment

Science overwhelmingly shows greenhouse gas concentrations at unprecedented levels due to human activity

Release date: 12/07/2009

President Obama and Administrator Jackson have publicly stated that they support a legislative solution to the problem of climate change and Congress' efforts to pass comprehensive climate legislation. However, climate change is threatening public health and welfare, and it is critical that EPA fulfill its obligation to respond to the 2007 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that determined that greenhouse gases fit within the Clean Air Act definition of air pollutants.

What did the Supreme Court say?

Short answer: the EPA had to "regulate greenhouse gases" ... like it or not.

High Court Faults EPA Inaction on Emissions

Critics of Bush Stance on Warming Claim Victory

By Robert Barnes and Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post Staff Writers -- April 3, 2007

The Supreme Court rebuked the Bush administration yesterday for refusing to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, siding with environmentalists in the court's first examination of the phenomenon of global warming.

The court ruled 5 to 4 that the Environmental Protection Agency violated the Clean Air Act by improperly declining to regulate new-vehicle emissions standards to control the pollutants that scientists say contribute to global warming.

"EPA has offered no reasoned explanation for its refusal to decide whether greenhouse gases cause or contribute to climate change," Justice John Paul Stevens wrote for the majority. The agency "identifies nothing suggesting that Congress meant to curtail EPA's power to treat greenhouse gases as air pollutants," the opinion continued.

So what has the EPA, done with this ruling, in the meantime?

They took time to study it. They issued 2 Findings, basically confirming the Court's ruling.

Climate Change - Regulatory Initiatives

Endangerment and Cause or Contribute Findings for Greenhouse Gases under Section 202(a) of the Clean Air Act

On December 7, 2009, the Administrator signed two distinct findings regarding greenhouse gases under section 202(a) of the Clean Air Act:

-- Endangerment Finding: The Administrator finds that the current and projected concentrations of the six key well-mixed greenhouse gases — carbon dioxide (CO2), methane (CH4), nitrous oxide (N2O), hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs), and sulfur hexafluoride (SF6) — in the atmosphere threaten the public health and welfare of current and future generations.

-- Cause or Contribute Finding: The Administrator finds that the combined emissions of these well-mixed greenhouse gases from new motor vehicles and new motor vehicle engines contribute to the greenhouse gas pollution which threatens public health and welfare.

These findings do not themselves impose any requirements on industry or other entities. However, this action is a prerequisite to finalizing the EPA's proposed greenhouse gas emission standards for light-duty vehicles, which EPA proposed in a joint proposal including the Department of Transportation's proposed CAFE standards on September 15, 2009.

And what has the new Administration's EPA, done with this ruling, more recently?

They issued a Memorandum, and created some new fleet standards ... woo hoo

President Obama Directs Administration to Create First-Ever:

National Efficiency and Emissions Standards for Medium- and Heavy-Duty Trucks

The White House -- Office of the Press Secretary

Calls for increased support for electric vehicles, extension of national policy for cars and light-trucks

Signing a Presidential Memorandum in the Rose Garden at the White House today, the President directed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to create a first-ever National Policy to increase fuel efficiency and decrease greenhouse gas pollution from medium- and heavy-duty trucks for Model Years 2014-2018. [...]

Will those new EPA "Regulatory Initiatives" create the ground-swell of Economic Demand to get Clean Energy industries off the ground? (in the same way that a Carbon Credit Market would?)

Harry Reid seems to think so, for now. He has passed this Energy "Hot Potato" to the EPA to handle, for now ... will THEY manage to come up with that Forward Progress, that the country so desperately needs? (to start to break our addiction to Oil and Coal?)

Or will they hem and haw, and eventually Punt, on some future 4th Down Play, later this year? (and "fumble" the ball back to Congress, who THEN will likely have even LESS of a consensus to make any "serious" Forward Progress.)

Like I said before:

We need some new Senators (at least 60 of them), who actually care enough about Energy Independence and the Future of the Planet -- enough to act ... to act NOW. ... It's NOT getting any easier, from here on out, if you ask me.

Senate energy package: Wait, it gets worse! (*Grist*)

by Kate Sheppard
23 Jul 2010 1:45 PM
Just got confirmation from several Senate offices about what is actually going to be in the package Democrats put forward next week. In a nutshell, this is going to be a very tiny package, with little in the way of energy measures. I'm not even sure you can call it an energy package at this point.

Here's what we know is going to be in the package:

Oil spill response measures, including elimination of the liability cap for damages and granting the power of subpoena to the presidential oil spill commission.

Reforms to the Department of Interior division charged with overseeing oil and gas development, likely similar to the package Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) has proposed.

$5 billion to spur the development of a natural gas truck fleet.

$5 billion to fund the Home Star program, which will encourage construction of energy-efficient homes.

$5 billion for the Land and Water Conservation Fund.
And that's it. Obviously, there's no carbon cap, that much we already knew. But there's also no other major energy efficiency standards, and, perhaps most importantly, no renewable electricity standard -- not even the weak one included in the energy bill last year.

A Senate Democratic aide tells me that leadership backed off including a cap, which they thought would become the focus of Republican opposition in the absence of the much-demonized carbon cap.

Senate aides hoping to put a positive spin on the package note that it at least does not include any of the really bad measures that progressive senators were worried about, including major incentives for coal and nuclear power and the elimination of the Environmental Protection Agency's ability to regulate greenhouse gases. It is also a package that Democrats are expected to support uniformly.

But, one aid added, "I don't think anyone around here is thrilled."

PESTICIDES

Environmental Groups Sue USEPA Over Insecticide (*Treehugger*)

by Bonnie Hulkower, New York, New York on 07.26.10
Business & Politics (news)
This past Thursday, the NRDC and Pesticide Action Network North America (PANNA) filed suit against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to try to force the agency to ban the pesticide chlorpyrifos. Chlorpyrifos, an organophosphate, has been prohibited for residential application since 2001 but is still often used in agriculture. Inhaling the chemical can cause nervous-system reactions such as blurred vision, dizziness and weakness. The groups petitioned the EPA to ban the insecticide three years ago and are suing the EPA for "unreasonably delayed" work on an anti-chlorpyrifos petition, which was opened for public comment in 2007, but never resulted in a final ruling.

The EPA moved earlier this year to limit chlorpyrifos use in Pacific Northwest states after the NMFS decided it could threaten endangered salmon species. PANNA and NRDC argue that chlorpyrifos' continued agricultural use exposes farmworkers, consumers, and bystanders to harm from the highly toxic pesticide. A number of other countries have already outlawed use of chlorpyrifos, including South Africa in May.

Pesticide manufacturers and some farmers dispute that there is a human health risk from chlorpyrifos, if the product is used safely, saying that there are no good alternatives. NRDC and PANNA argue that the pesticide causes asthma and developmental problems such as ADHD. When chlorpyrifos was banned for household use nine years ago by the EPA, health effects on children were cited including delayed mental and motor skill development. Chlorpyrifos is still widely used as an insecticide on corn, grapes, oranges, almonds, and other crops, as well as on golf courses and for pest control in urban areas. According to the California Department of

Pesticide Regulation, the pesticide is still in use in all of the nine Bay Area counties. It is most widely used in the Central Valley and is polluting 29 of the state's waterways, mostly in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, according to state records. Environmental groups say it can cling to sprayed crops, but is also capable of vaporizing and being carried airborne.

Residents who live nearby crops sprayed with Chlorpyrifos have reported suffering numerous negative health effects. In one instance, Luis Medellin had five times more Chlorpyrifos in his body than the national average. Symptoms of over exposure to Chlorpyrifos are reported to include headaches, nausea, and vomiting.

WATER

In midst of river cleanup, supporters are divided (*Huffington Post*)

July 25, 2010
LENOX, Mass. — Once a dumping ground for chemicals, a stretch of the Housatonic River that winds near this Berkshires hamlet is being scoured in a lengthy, expensive cleanup. Now, dredging other parts of the riverbed is under consideration, but the fishers, bird watchers and swimmers who would benefit are wondering how much effort is too much.

General Electric Co. used compounds called PCBs, now known to cause cancer, in producing transformers from 1932 to 1977 at its 254-acre plant in Pittsfield, Mass. Under a federal consent decree about two decades after it stopped, the company began cleaning up PCBs that had spewed for years into a residential neighborhood and a 2-mile stretch of the Housatonic.

Now, the $400 million first phase of the cleanup is almost over. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency must decide in coming months what to do about pollution in the rest of the 149-mile river that flows through rural western Massachusetts and Connecticut and empties into Long Island Sound.

Options presented by GE include extensive dredging and removing up to 2.25 million cubic yards of PCB-tainted sediment and floodplain soil, and "monitored natural recovery," a euphemism for little more than hopeful watching and waiting.

"Many sportsmen don't want anything done. They want the river to heal itself," said Mark Jester, president of the 3,000-member Berkshire County League of Sportsmen.

Jester, who enjoys duck hunting and other activities, said sportsmen worry that dredging could spoil the character of the river and disrupt recreational activity. He's quick to add, however, that

he favors an "ecologically sensitive" compromise in which GE would decontaminate "hot spots" on the river, with limited dredging.

Polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, are chemical compounds once used widely as coolants and lubricants in electrical equipment. The government considers PCBs a probable human carcinogen and studies show they pose a risk to wildlife in the river ecosystem, including fish, frogs, waterfowl and mink.

Though banned in 1977, the compounds remain a problem because they do not readily break down in the environment and persist over long periods of time.

The goal remains a "fishable, swimmable river," said Tim Gray, executive director of the Housatonic River Initiative.

Advisories against eating fish are posted along the full length of the river, and GE contends that under current EPA standards, even the most aggressive cleanup won't bring down those signs.

Gray and other environmentalists say GE should consider newer technologies such as using chemicals, intense heat or even biological agents to separate the PCBs from soil or sediment and destroy them. The company has said such methods are too untested to be reliable.

"General Electric makes aircraft engines; they are smart engineers. They can figure out how to clean this river," Gray said.

The Housatonic debate echoes an ongoing one involving the Hudson River in New York, where GE is paying for the cleanup of PCBs that were discharged from plants at Fort Edward and Hudson Falls. The company last year dredged sediment from the river about 40 miles north of Albany, but claimed the work actually stirred up PCBs in the water and spread them down river. GE proposed to halt further excavation.

GE has until Oct. 15 to submit revised recommendations for cleaning the river to the EPA. Without giving specifics, the company says it will offer two revised proposals that reflect the concern that dredging can harm the river as much as help it.

"The point with these environmentally sensitive alternatives is to take a less ecologically invasive approach, with less dredging and looking at more targeted extraction of PCBs," said Peter O'Toole, a GE spokesman.

In 2008, GE gave the EPA a 722-page report recommending a 10-year, $184 million plan to remove and dispose of about 250,000 tons of river sediment and about 90,000 tons of floodplain soil. The company said it would reduce by 94 percent the levels of PCBs moving downstream and cut the levels in fish by at least 70 percent.

Under the consent decree, GE must pay for any cleanup.

David Carpenter, a PCBs expert at the State University of New York-Albany, said he advocates dredging because PCBs are so persistent.

"Natural processes are never going to take care of these compounds," he said. "They are only going to spread."

Another issue is how much of the Housatonic to cleanse. It's widely believed that the final order will focus primarily on the most heavily contaminated portion, a roughly 10-mile stretch from Pittsfield to Woods Pond in Lenox.

Created by a nearby dam, the manmade pond sits quietly tucked away at the foot of October Mountain in the picturesque Berkshires. The government says PCBs are embedded in the pond sediment and adjacent floodplain soil.

The Connecticut portion of the river is likely to be subject largely to monitoring only, though state officials have argued that GE should address PCBs that have collected at dams that once helped power mill towns along the river.

Officials must sort through the arguments before making a decision.

"While we all hope we'll have a clean Housatonic, we have to go through that process to determine exactly how clean that will be," said Susan Svirsky, the EPA's Housatonic River project manager.

For Thomas Hoffman, of Washington, Mass., the debate is personal on two levels.

Hoffman said his father worked for GE in Pittsfield for 40 years before dying of pancreatic cancer at age 59. He can't prove the cancer was linked to PCBs and doesn't hold the company responsible for his father's death, but does fault the company for not acting quickly enough when it began to realize the extent of the environmental disaster.

These days, he enjoys catching "trophy-sized" bass and pike and relishes canoe trips down the Housatonic where he can paddle for miles in solitude while catching glimpses of otter, ospreys and even bald eagles.

Hoffman shudders at the thought of "heavy machinery" tearing up the river but also realizes that something must be done.

"Yes, it has to be cleaned up," said Hoffman. "To not clean it up and pretend (the PCBs) will go away is not the answer."

Cargill's Plans to Pave Over Wetlands Gets Residents Riled (*Treehugger*)

Cargill, a Minnesota-based agribusiness goliath, is looking to spread its real estate ownership to San Francisco. However, its planned development of as many as 30,000 residents is aimed at an ecologically vital area of the bay -- the Redwood City salt ponds. Cargill calls it an industrial wasteland, but agencies who issue permission for development stress that the 1,436 acres of wetlands-turned-salt-ponds are anything but, and need to be restored to their former glory. Those opposed include everyone from the Water Board, the US Army Corps, the EPA and over 140 elected officials and environmental groups. It spells a heated battle of political will that could have national consequences.

Currently, the area is used for salt production. And while Cargill calls the site a "factory without a roof" and "inhospitable to man or beast" the reality is that the area could be restored to a thriving wetland when no longer used for salt production, providing important habitat to birds and other species. Even the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency weighed in and called the salt ponds "critically important aquatic resources that warrant special attention and protection." Expert scientists say that the bay area needs to see 100,000 acres of wetlands restored to support a healthy ecosystem, which is home to endangered species, acts as a filter for runoff pollution, provides natural flood control, and is a buffer protecting communities from rising sea levels due to global climate change.

Cargill, however, has enough weight to toss around that the project, which would be 17 times larger than any Bay fill project ever approved and the only housing project ever approved on retired salt ponds, is still looking to get the go-ahead from Redwood City. The company is, according to Forbes in 2009, the largest privately held company in the United States. It owns the salt ponds, and just needs the proper permitting to move forward on the project. Save The Bay, an advocate for the San Francisco Bay ecosystem since 1961, reports that "instead of selling or donating the former wetlands to be restored to tidal marsh and protected as open space, Cargill hired Arizona-based luxury-home developer DMB Associates to propose a new city with 12,000 homes, a million square feet of office space, schools and playing fields all behind a massive levee on the 1,436 acres of sea level salt ponds," and that the company has already spent millions in advertising, consulting, and lobbying for their project.

"The retired Redwood City salt ponds are not an infill site," said Peter Bosselmann, an internationally-recognized urban design expert and Professor of Urban Design in Architecture, City & Regional Planning, and Landscape Architecture at the UC Berkeley Institute of Urban and Regional Development. "Restoring the site as a tidal marsh would be to the greatest benefit of the region's air quality."

The Huffington Post writes, "Although they are the ultimate outsiders, Cargill and DMB have infiltrated Redwood City, trying to buy influence with community donations, from sponsoring little league teams to buying the prize-winning turkey at the local 4H club; they have promised that group a farm.

"But despite this public relations blitz, the hurdles to project approval are rising, and community opposition is growing. The State of California's new Climate Change Adaptation Strategy singles out restorable shoreline parcels as a place to prohibit new development. Save The Bay's Freedom of Information Act request revealed that the federal government has determined that the site is a

protected water body under the Clean Water Act - a direct rejection of Cargill's legal claims and their public relations spin."

The loss of an important habitat like these wetlands is something felt not only locally, but nationally -- both ecologically and economically. As business giants are allowed to determine our landscape to the point of paving over important habitats, citizens loose out on the chance to live next to and be supported by nature. It's not healthy for anyone. And in a time when ecosystems are collapsing all over the world, we need to keep every little bit we have left.

Save The Bay hopes to deliver 5,000+ signatures to the Redwood City Council next month. Don't Pave My Bay launched earlier this month as a tool of citizen activism, where supporters of restoring the wetland habitat and stopping construction of yet more residents can voice their opinions.