U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
Blog Round-up
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ROUND-UP OF MAJOR BLOGS

AIR

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

There's lots of overlap between ending our oil addiction in the United States and combatting climate change, with setting a (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 d all of these and the associated environmental degradation ad infinitum.

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 comes in. Whether established as a carbon tax or through a carbon trading system, this 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.

July 23, 2010
Bruce Nilles
Director, Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign
Posted: July 22, 2010 11:45 AM

Game Changer: EPA Asserts Tar Sands Pipeline Environmental Analysis Is Inadequate (*Huffington Post*)

This post was co-written by Lena Moffitt, Washington Representative for the Sierra Club Dirty Fuels Campaign.
This week the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) blasted the State Department's draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline - asserting that the EIS is "woefully deficient" because "the Draft EIS does not provide the scope or detail of analysis necessary to fully inform decision makers and the public, and we recommend that additional information and analysis be provided."

The Keystone XL is a massive pipeline designed to carry tar sands oil from Canada into the U.S., and we've long called its EIS inadequate. Now our nation's environmental watchdog is putting its weight and expertise behind that assessment.

EPA is charged with protecting Americans' health and safety, and its concerns about this pipeline underscore and validate what Americans are saying across the country.

EPA is demanding more than 30 additional pieces of information needed based on grave concerns such as "the Draft EIS does not fully identify and address the potential for disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects on minority, low-income and Tribal populations."

EPA also raises serious concerns about the threats tar sands pose to the health and safety of American communities, which underscores the need to proceed with caution when it comes to making a decision of this magnitude about the country's energy future.

And given what we've witnessed in the Gulf of Mexico, where rubbers stamps for the oil industry were all too common, we welcome this call for a more thorough and rigorous approach to the proposed Keystone XL pipeline.

Here's just a partial list of what EPA is asking of the State Department, given the woefully deficient consideration of these environmental and human impacts:

- A broader assessment of the need for this pipeline, including a "robust analysis of options for meeting national energy and climate policy objectives";
- A more thorough investigation into the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the project, including a consideration of Canadian tar sands development (which EPA asserts is an action clearly connected to building the pipeline and must be considered);
- A lifecycle assessment of "well-to-wheel" (greenhouse gas) emissions generated from tar sands;
- A better understanding of mitigation measures that could be taken to decrease the emissions from tar sands developments;
- An assessment of the air quality impacts of refining tar sands, and a more in-depth look at the environmental justice ramifications of these air quality concerns;

- A much more thorough emergency response plan, including a consideration of the specific impacts to water bodies or a leak or spill of the chemical dilutent needed to transport heavy tar sands oil;
- A consideration of the safety waiver [the Department of Transportation] is considering granting to TransCanada, with special attention paid to the sulfur content of the fuel and how this would impact the thinner steel which would be used if the waiver were granted;
- A complete assessment of all the project's impacts to wetlands;
- A consideration of the impacts of Canadian tar sands developments on migratory birds.

That list alone underscores the high risk and hefty cost of pursuing toxic tar sands oil at the expense of America's clean energy future.

We applaud EPA's scrutiny.

All of the additional analysis requested by EPA must be prepared to allow for a robust consideration of the impacts of this pipeline, and whether or not is it in our nation's interest.

And because of an executive order, these requests from EPA mean that the Keystone XL plan cannot go through until the Department of State can deliver completed analysis addressing all of these points.

We have said all along, an open and honest dialogue about our energy future leads to the conclusion that we should say no to this filthy project. Instead, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton should say yes to clean energy, yes to clean air, and yes to an oil-free future.

BP SPILL

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

Particulate matter associated air quality at USEPA sampling stations along US Gulf Coast - snapshot indication. Image credit: 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 symptoms. Looks like both are happening at once. See some explanations below. From , 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.

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.

Georgianne Nienaber:

Gulf Fisheries Opened: Safe Or BP Politics, PR and "Sock Puppetry?" (*Huffington Post*)

News OCR Text: Dr. Jane Lubchenco, NOAA Administrator, announced the re-opening of a substantial portion of the southeast section of the closed fishing area in Gulf of Mexico federal waters at a press conference on Thursday. NOAA reopened 26,388 square miles of Gulf waters to commercial and recreational fishing at 6 p.m., EDT Thursday. This opening was decided upon after "consultation with the FDA and under a re-opening protocol agreed to by NOAA, the FDA, and the Gulf states," Lubchenco said.

At its closest point, the area to be reopened is about 190 miles southeast of the Deepwater/BP well-head, and the area where the majority of fishing will occur is about 220 miles from the well-head, along the west Florida shelf.

This is a notable development, coming on the heels of Senator Barbara Mikulski's (D-Maryland) July 15 hearings on BP's use of almost 2 million gallons of dispersants on the oil released from the April 20 explosion of the Macondo well-head in the Mississippi Canyon oil field. Mikulski's

hearing raised many questions regarding oversight, accountability and reliability of scientific data.

In another development this week, EPA toxic waste official, Hugh Kaufman told Amy Goodman of Democracy Now , "The EPA, the government, NOAA, etc., have been sock puppets in this cover up (of the dangers of Corexit)."

Is the Obama administration and BP engaging in politics and PR with a dangerous twist?

There is no doubt that Gulf commercial fishermen have been suffering greatly from a lack of income in the aftermath of the explosion of the Macondo well-head. States have lost revenue from fishing licensing and supportive recreational industries, and BP would certainly like to reduce its liability for lost income and wages.

According to Lubchenco, NOAA's rationale for opening the closed area is that NOAA data have shown no oil in the area since mid June, and United States Coast Guard observers flying over the area in last 30 days have also not observed any oil. Additionally, trajectory models show the area is at a low risk for future exposure to oil, and fish caught in the area and tested by NOAA experts have shown no signs of contamination.

But is this enough?

Between June 23 and July 5, NOAA collected samples of fish, including grouper, snapper, tuna, and mahi mahi from the area where the heaviest fishing will take place.

"Sensory and chemical testing following the methodology and procedures in the re-opening protocol showed no detectable oil or dispersant odors or flavors, and the results of chemical analysis were well below the levels of concern," NOAA said in a press release.

In a transcript from Mikulski's Senate hearings last week Larry Robinson, the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere, said, "Research on the effectiveness and effects of dispersants and dispersed oil has been underway for more than three decades, but vital gaps still exist," adding, "chemical dispersants can be an effective tool in the response strategy, but like all methods involve tradeoffs in terms of effectiveness and potential for collateral impacts."
At the sea surface, early life-stages of fish and shellfish are much more sensitive than juveniles or adults to dispersants and dispersed oil. There are no data on the toxicity of dispersed oil to deep-sea marine life at any stage, so we have to extrapolate based on existing knowledge. However, at both the surface and sub-surface, modeling and monitoring is confirming that dispersed oil concentrations decline rapidly with distance from the wellhead as it mixes with seawater and moves with the currents away from the treated areas.
Robinson added, "Thus far, we haven't found any evidence of these contaminants in any of the species that we've taken outside of the contaminated area."

But what about fish and water movement from the contaminated areas? Is a smell test enough?

The science of testing and monitoring appears to be inexact at best.

Dr. Martin Duziak of TETRAD Technologies Group said, "Even if it is all clear, which I seriously doubt, because they are relying upon incomplete and mostly superficial observations, those fish and other sea creatures have been eating all this time and there needs to be some simple and inexpensive but REAL testing of anything caught."

An additional concern is that even if there is no oil in the reopened zones, Tropical Depression 3 has formed off the southeast tip of Florida and is likely to become Bonnie, the second named storm of the 2010 season, later today. The current storm track threatens the entire US gulf including the region of BP's Deep Horizon spill site.

Duziak asked, "Is the area going to be still open for fishing and recreation after that storm has done to the Gulf pretty much what a Kitchen-Aid mixer does to pudding batter?"

It is intuitive that any new storm in the Gulf of Mexico will result in new patterns of subsea oil/dispersant distribution. This does not take into account any additional amounts of oil if the current containment cap is compromised.

NOAA says it "continues to work closely with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the states to ensure seafood safety."

Colorado Nuke Drilling Experiment Still Concerning Citizens 41 Years Later (*Huffington Post*)

PARACHUTE, Colo. It may go down as one of the most bizarre nuclear experiments ever tried. In 1969, the government detonated a subterranean nuclear bomb to break loose natural gas deposits from tight sandstone formations more than 8,000 feet below ground on a Colorado mountain. The bomb was twice as powerful as the one that destroyed Hiroshima, Japan, in 1945. The scheme worked to an extent. The gas was unlocked by the blast but was deemed too radioactive for commercial use.

Four decades later, energy companies are drilling near the nuclear site as they look to tap Colorado's lucrative oil and gas reserves. Some local residents say they don't trust the industry after what happened here and in the Gulf of Mexico during the oil spill. They're fearful that accidents could pollute the air with radioactive gas if drilling gets much closer.

"I'm not 100 percent sure that the gas industry or the oil industry is careful enough, or has enough plans in place, that if something happens like the oil spill that I would be safe," said Parachute Town Trustee Judith Hayward, who owns half the mineral rights in a 40-acre no-drill zone at the site of the nuclear experiment.

Locals are also quick to mock the idea floated during the Gulf oil spill to close the breached well with a nuclear bomb. Engineers tried a nuke in the course of energy exploration here, and it didn't turn out as expected.

Project Rulison was one of three locations in Colorado and New Mexico where the federal government set off nuclear blasts during the Cold War to trigger natural gas production. All were part of a program that promoted using nuclear explosions for peacetime purposes.

A plaque in a patch of yellow sweet clover still marks the site of the Rulison blast, on a green mountainside about three hours west of Denver.

The U.S. Energy Department prohibits drilling below 6,000 feet in a 40-acre radius that surrounds the Rulison site, and Colorado regulators have kept wells at least a half-mile away. The requires a public hearing if companies want to drill closer than that, and they'd have to prove that their proposed well would protect the public and the environment.

The Energy Department suggested last year that the state could allow energy companies to drill closer to the area if done in a "conservative, staged" approach.

Noble Energy Co. holds drilling leases within a half-mile of the Rulison site but hasn't applied for permits to drill closer. The company declined to comment.

Local landowners have been fighting against any potential drilling in the area, and last month a Colorado appeals court said they are entitled to a hearing on a company's plans to drill within three miles of the site. The state commission, which said it listened to residents' comments despite the lack of a hearing, is appealing the ruling. The maintains that years of sampling and monitoring by the Environmental Protection Agency show there's been no radiation above what Coloradans are already exposed to in nature.

Studies by outside agencies and consultants show it's "extremely unlikely" current drilling near the zone would expose residents to radiation beyond background levels that exist in nature, said commission director David Neslin. Under emergency plans that companies must file with the state, problem wells would immediately be shut down and contained, he said.

"There's a misperception (that) no one is minding the store or putting in protections if problems arise or assessing whether problems are likely," Neslin said. "On the contrary, our commission has been very much engaged and involved."

The Energy Department report said radiation from the blast is largely incorporated within molten rock that formed a sort of glass chamber. "There's very little danger of it escaping, if at all," said Jack Craig, a site manager for the Energy Department's Office of Legacy Management.

"We feel that there's no impact from the detonation on public safety, health or the environment," Craig said. "I understand residents have different opinions."

Hayward's stepson, Craig Hayward, was 18 when he watched the Rulison blast from about six miles away. Nearby residents were evacuated for the day.

"When they touched that thing off, I saw shale cliffs crumbling," he said. "After a while, I saw the ground rolling. It was like a wave coming through. Cars were parked there. They were rocking back and forth."

With his family's mineral rights around the blast site potentially worth millions of dollars, Craig Hayward said he supports drilling if it doesn't harm people or the environment.

"But how do you prove it in advance?" he asked.

Judith Hayward is more firm about not drilling: "Why do it when thousands and thousands and thousands of other acres are permitted and safer?"

Online:

http://cogcc.state.co.us/
http://bit.ly/9YNHmM

Oil Spill: Gulf Environment Trampled By Messy Cleanup Operation (*Huffington Post*)

FOURCHON BEACH, La. — The 5,600 vessels taking part in the oil spill operation on the Gulf of Mexico make up the largest fleet assembled since the Allied invasion of Normandy, according to the Coast Guard.

Hordes of helicopters, bulldozers, Army trucks, ATVs, barges, dredges, airboats, workboats, cleanup crews, media, scientists and volunteers have descended on the beaches, blue waters and golden marshes of the Gulf Coast.

That's a lot of propellers, anchors, tires, and feet for a fragile ecosystem to take, and a tough truth is emerging: In many places, the oil cleanup itself is causing environmental damage.

Part of that is inevitable – the oil has to get cleaned up somehow, and BP and the government will be subject to second-guessing no matter what.

"Absolutely nothing you do to respond to an oil spill is without impacts of its own," said Lisa Jackson, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Since the Deepwater Horizon rig exploded April 20, killing 11, and oil began gushing into the Gulf, federal, state and BP officials say they have been guided in their response by picking the less damaging cleanup method.

Still, environmentalists and veterans of other spills say the torrent of untested cleanup methods rushed into practice by panicked officials and unqualified experts is wreaking havoc and, at least in spots, may be unnecessary.

"The more you disperse (with chemicals), the more you bring in these big machines, the more you bring in inexperienced people and the more sand berms you build, the less chance you have of letting Mother Nature and skimmers and booms do the job," said Mike Brewer of Buras, La., who ran an oil spill response company and is working on the BP cleanup.

For starters, the EPA allowed BP PLC to spray a chemical dispersant, a product called Corexit, to break up oil right as it came out of BP's broken well nearly a mile below the surface. The idea is to save shorelines from being clobbered with vast waves of crude.

In practice, the use of dispersants that had never been tested that far beneath the surface has made the oil much more difficult to track than it would have been in a single, massive slick. And environmentalists and marine biologists still aren't convinced the chemicals are safe for sea life.

The EPA halted underwater spraying while it tested samples collected by BP, then allowed it to resume once the results came back to the agency's satisfaction. Further tests are ongoing, and crews quit spraying dispersant once the well was contained this week, Jackson said.

"Basically, we conducted uncontrolled experiments in the open ocean – that does not seem like a good idea to me," said John Hocevar, the oceans campaign director for Greenpeace USA.

Jackson said there was little evidence that the chemical dispersants had caused damage and called their effects "relatively mild."

Eager to be seen as taking charge, Gov. Bobby Jindal began building a series of untested sand islands and other barriers along the Louisiana coast, making construction of these berms a personal crusade. In theory, sand berms and jetties will stop the oil from entering sensitive estuaries.

But berms and jetties interrupt shrimp and fish migrations as well as tidal flows; the work can even undermine what little is left of Louisiana's gooey and sediment-layered shoreline.

"None of the coastal scientists have signed onto this thing," said Leonard Bahr, a former adviser to both Republican and Democratic governors in Louisiana on coastal restoration issues.

Fishermen and locals, however, almost unanimously agree with Jindal's unorthodox barrier plans.

"We know these (berms) stop the oil. It worked on Fourchon Beach," said Windell Curole, a levee manager in south Lafourche Parish, an area long struggling with erosion. "The people that are pushing for these things are more invested in it than the scientists."

In a move that put its compensation costs toward curtailing the spill's environmental effects, BP hired truckloads of inexperienced oil spill responders – shrimpers, unemployed workers, college students, and migrant workers. The manpower is essential, but their footprint can be huge, especially if they're not used to watching their step.

"It was like the Wild West there for a while, and it still is to some degree," said Drew Wheelan, a wildlife biologist with the American Bird Association Inc., a conservation group.

Wheelan said cleanup crews trampled on numerous nesting bird colonies, including at least one batch of least tern eggs he saw. Wilson's plovers and endangered black skimmers on Louisiana's Grand Isle and East Grand Terre islands were threatened by intensive beach cleanups.

"The whole entire area in the past two weeks has been completely crisscrossed by tire tracks. The entire cleanup there has been entirely sickening," Wheelan said recently of East Grand Terre. "There are tire tracks from the low tide line all the way up into the dune vegetation. Not an inch of that frontal beach has been spared from traffic."

Out on the Gulf, BP brought in a super-sized skimmer from Taiwan – the "A Whale" – capable of sucking up 20 million gallons of water a day, aiming to corral huge quantities of oiled water at once. Like some of the other methods, it had never been tested and scientists worried that it could cause serious damage.

"It will suck in a lot of biology," said James Cowan, a Louisiana State University fisheries scientist.

Coast Guard officials questioned its effectiveness, noting that it would be better for attacking a single huge slick than for the countless smaller pools that the dispersant helped create. Authorities announced last week that the massive ship was dropping out of the spill operation.

Forrest Travirca has seen the cleanup's side effects up close as a land manager for the Wisner estate, a public land trust that includes Fourchon Beach and a large marsh area that has seen some of the heaviest oil so far.

On an airboat cruise through marsh, signs of the messy cleanup jumped out. Reddish-brown and sticky tar coated the blades of marsh grass behind a beach lined with sand baskets brought in by Army dump trucks. Absorbent boom lay washed up against shorelines. Crews had staked down shade tents every few hundred yards.

Almost as soon as he stepped onto the sand, Travirca saw something he didn't like: Two ATV tracks meandering carefree across the sands. Someone with the cleanup had strayed from designated traffic corridors.

"This really upsets me," Travirca said, standing over the fresh set of tracks. "They're not supposed to be driving back here. They've got to drive along the front of the beach. Birds nest back here."

He walked a few paces away and pointed out another set of ATV tracks he discovered a few days before. "This track here was inches from a tern nest with eggs."

At least now, more than three months after the spill, the cleanup is becoming more organized.

In the beginning, he said, the beach "looked like the autobahn."

CLIMATE CHANGE

News Headline: David Doniger:

Forward or Backward on Global Warming? (*Huffington Post)*

A year ago, the House of Representatives passed clean energy and climate legislation that would put America on the road towards the carbon pollution reductions we desperately need for our economic, environmental, and national security.

Today, in a House appropriations subcommittee, some members of Congress who still deny the reality of climate science and the urgency of action are expected to propose a funding “rider” that would block use of the Clean Air Act to start curbing that pollution.

We need Congress to move us forward, not backward. We need to start solving global warming, and stop pretending it doesn't exist.

The last decade was the hottest decade on record. The last 12 months were the hottest year on record. Last June was the hottest June on record. Worldwide.

The one thing Congress must not do while it works on new legislation is to take away the laws we already have on the books to get started.

When it wrote the Clean Air Act nearly four decades ago, Congress gave the Environmental Protection Agency the tools and the responsibility to protect the American people when science shows that new pollutants pose dangers to their health or environment. The Supreme Court upheld this authority in its landmark 2007 global warming decision, Massachusetts v. EPA . The Court ordered EPA to decide, based on the science, whether carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping pollutants endanger our health and welfare. EPA made the endangerment determination in December 2009, after a painstaking and thorough scientific review.

EPA has made real progress since then with consensus standards to cut the carbon pollution from cars and trucks. Now it is time to make real progress on power plants, refineries, and other industries.

If the funding rider were to become law, it would effectively overturn the Supreme Court's decision and block EPA from responding to the science. It would prohibit the agency from using the Clean Air Act to cut carbon pollution from power plants or other industries.

It should be called the Dirty Air Act. The subcommittee must vote “no.”

Tomorrow it's going to be 94° in Washington – not a record, but damn hot.

Maybe the committee should meet outdoors.

WATER

Residents tell EPA Pa. gas drilling poisons water (Huffington Post)

MARC LEVY | July 22, 2010 11:54 PM EST
CANONSBURG, Pa. — People who make a living from a natural gas drilling technique that involves pumping chemical-laced water into the earth and others who believe it has poisoned them or their well water packed into a hotel ballroom in southwestern Pennsylvania on Thursday night to make an impression on federal researchers.

Residents of Hickory, about 15 miles southwest of Pittsburgh, called for intensive study of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, and told a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency panel that their well water turned foul after drilling began nearby in the last few years.

Darrell Smitsky said five of his goats died mysteriously and, even though state regulators told him the water was safe, his own test showed sky-high levels of manganese and iron. When he blamed the drilling company, he said, it responded, "Can you prove it?"

Stephanie Hallowitch said her family's well water is no longer safe to even allow her children to run through the sprinklers.

"I urge the EPA to help my family and other families living near drilling to get answers to their questions," she said. The research, she continued, must be done "to protect other families before it is too late and they are in our situation."

In fracking, drilling crews pump millions of gallons of sand- and chemical-laced water deep into the earth to break up dense rock to free the natural gas. Some of that water returns as a briny, chemical- and metal-laden brew and is usually stored in open pits until it's trucked to treatment plants or underground injection wells.

The oil and gas industry steadfastly defends the fracking process as having been proven safe over many years and says it is a crucial tool if the country is going to be able to harvest its gas reserves. With many speakers calling for a moratorium on fracking or tough federal regulation, industry representatives contended that states are already doing that job.

The EPA has begun a new look at fracking as gas drillers swarm to the lucrative Marcellus Shale region and blast into other shale reserves around the country. The process is currently exempt from federal regulation, and instead states apply their own rules to it.

Shale drilling is being viewed as so lucrative that international exploration companies are investing billions of dollars in the pursuit.

James Erb, of the American Petroleum Institute, which represents major oil and gas producers, told the EPA that the group is aware of substantial public concern over fracking and that it supports the EPA's review.

API, he said, is confident that the sound application of fracking causes no significant risk to human health, drinking water sources or the environment.

Lou D'Amico, president of the Pennsylvania Independent Oil & Gas Association, made up of hundreds of businesses, said that no example exists of fracking having polluted ground water and that the EPA study should include a review of complaints lodged to state-level agencies and how they were investigated.

"The controversy is one based on media-generated public hysteria and perception, not science, fact or evidence," he said.

Thursday's hearing lasted five hours, with scores of speakers each getting two minutes at a microphone.

Canonsburg is at the heart of hundreds of Marcellus Shale wells that began to be drilled in earnest in 2008. Some geologists say the vast Marcellus Shale region primarily beneath Pennsylvania, New York, West Virginia and Ohio could become the nation's largest natural gas field.

Already, about 1,500 Marcellus Shale wells have been drilled in Pennsylvania in barely two years, and thousands more are expected, transforming areas of the state. Numerous landowners are getting paid to lease their land for drilling or are receiving royalty checks from producing wells. Meanwhile, many industries such as steel pipe makers and haulers are seeing huge new demand from drilling companies.

But many landowners are coming forward to tell stories about spoiled well water.

The EPA's $1.9 million study is expected to yield preliminary results by the end of 2012, Fred Hauchman, director of the EPA's Office of Science Policy, told attendees at the outset.

Hauchman promised to reach out to experts and study a wide variety of water sources, and he said an advisory board of scientists has told the agency to focus on the impact on water quality and quantity.