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

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Blog Round-up

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ROUND-UP OF MAJOR BLOGS

AIR

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We Won't Accept More Poison For Less Carbon (*Huffington Post*)

Written by Phaedra Ellis-Lamkins, CEO of Green For All, and Ben Jealous, President of NAACP
As Senators enter the final rounds of negotiations on the climate and energy bill, big utility companies apparently are making unconscionable demands that threaten the health and safety of all Americans.

For example, The Hill reports: "Power company officials are now asking for relief from upcoming EPA restrictions on pollution the agency has long regulated under the Clean Air Act, including ozone, particulate matter and lead." Other stories also suggest that big utilities want the United States Senate to somehow bargain away EPA's authority to protect America from dirty air and water.

These demands are unacceptable.

The American people deserve a climate and energy bill that not only improves air quality, but also creates jobs that will help pull the economy out of recession. This bill is in danger of doing neither. In spite of this, we are hopeful that there is a better, more equitable approach to this legislation. We believe that American policy can be smart enough to protect both our children and our grandchildren.

The Gulf oil spill, the coal mine explosion in West Virginia--these are just the most recent in a long line of disasters that prove our current dirty energy economy is broken. Our reliance on these fossil fuels endangers the lives of countless Americans. We believe that Americans should not have to choose between personal safety and putting food on the table for our families.

There is only one federal agency standing between our communities and even worse degradation: the Environmental Protection Agency. If the bill limits the ability of the EPA to enforce greenhouse gas regulation, or worse limits the agency's ability to enforce regulation of mercury and ozone, the American people will suffer immediate and long-term health consequences, from asthma to early death.

If the Senate can get this right, this historic climate and energy bill will maintain our clean air protections, while opening the door to a new era: one in which our nation is no longer addicted to

dirty, dangerous fuels; no longer dependent on overseas supplies of oil; and finally able to put millions to work in clean, new industries.

Take action now.

Utilities Try to Weasel Out of Pollution Controls - By Supporting Climate Action? (T*reehugger*)

With all of the jostling around the plans for energy reform, it can be hard to keep track of what exactly is going on: With the competing pieces of legislation, the Kerry-Lieberman bill on the wane, and mixed signals from the White House and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, energy reform has been in flux so long that the details can seem like a wash. But that's why we've got Dave Roberts -- the always-astute green policy writer noticed that when the dust tentatively settled around , those utilities weren't as opposed as one might think. No, some were even open to negotiations on the subject -- so as long as they got to weasel out of other, arguably more important, pollution controls. : EPA is working on a whole suite of new Clean Air Act regulations. I'm not talking about the much-discussed EPA regulation of greenhouse gases -- I mean tightened standards on traditional ("criteria") air pollutants. The Clean Air Act dictates that EPA regularly revisit pollution standards and update them to reflect the best current science. Needless to say, that wasn't done during the Bush years, so there's a huge backlog of work. Every single criteria pollutant is being revisited. The upshot is, there are tons of new standards either recently released or on their way in the next year or so ...

The utilities see an opening here. Their support will be crucial for getting the energy bill through the Senate. In exchange for their support, they are now asking to be exempted from the EPA's new rules

And the reason is simple -- those stricter Clean Air regs would mean that the coal companies and utilities would have to seriously upgrade and clean up some of the nation's dirtier, older power plants, and probably take some offline. From a strict greenhouse gas emissions perspective, that alone would likely be more beneficial than a seriously weakened utility-only energy bill.

I agree wholeheartedly with Roberts -- the 'utility only' climate bill will already likely pretty crappy. Giving the biggest, dirtiest polluters in the nation a license to dodge regulations in exchange for that is a tradeoff that's simply not worth making. It boils down to this: Roberst is right. If the utilities are granted an exemption in the bill, any and all green groups and environmentalists should come out against the bill.

ENERGY

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We Won't Accept More Poison For Less Carbon (*Huffington Post*)

July 17, 2010
Written by Phaedra Ellis-Lamkins, CEO of Green For All, and Ben Jealous, President of NAACP

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Energy Star Hands Out First Ever Certification For a Data Center (*Treehugger*)

July 17, 2010

Recently Energy Star announced that it would be certifying not just data center equipment but data centers themselves, further encouraging IT companies to be strategic about the architecture, hardware and software of their centers. The first company to get certification was just announced -- NetApp, which scored a 99 out of 100 on EPA's grading scale for Energy Star certification. Importantly, NetApp emphasizes the importance of the building itself in getting data centers to minimize energy consumption.

"Improving the energy efficiency of our nation's buildings is critical to protecting our environment," says Jean Lupinacci, chief of the Energy Star Commercial and Industrial Branch. "NetApp is leading the way by earning EPA's Energy Star for its data center."

Netapp states that to earn the Energy Star certification, the company reduced cooling costs by boosting the temperature threshold in the data center to 74°F; cools the data center with "free cooling," which means using only outside air, for 67% of the year; using cold aisle containment, which keeps the temperature of server rooms down; and overhead air distribution, which sucks the rising hot air out of the room to minimize the need for fans.

The company has set the bar high for others working to earn top rankings from Energy Start on data center efficiency. The data center, which opened in 2009, helped shrink NetApp's carbon emissions by 95,000 tons annually.

Data centers are responsible for an estimated 2% of global GHG emissions. While that's a relatively small percentage, it's important to minimize as much as possible. Considering the bulk of a data center's electricity consumption goes toward cooling servers, it is only logical to think intelligently about efficiency infrastructure design so that the energy consumption and therefore carbon footprint of IT is as tiny as possible.

However, the Energy Star certification for data centers is still new, and GreenBiz points out three areas where improvements can be made, including having rating consider the climate in which the data center is located, which impacts a company's strategies for minimizing energy use; Energy Star working with local utilities to create rebates and incentives for data center retrofits; and removing the address requirement from data centers to bolster security for and trust from companies participating in certification. All great suggestions to get more companies vying for high scores from Energy Star.

MINING

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Fate of Biggest US Mountaintop Removal Mining Project to be Decided This Year (*Treehugger*)

Mountaintop Removal Mining Site. Photo via the NY Times
If any of you are familiar with my past postings on the topic, you'll already be aware of my

general attitude towards the practice of mountaintop removal mining. To those who aren't, this should sum it up: It's an inexcusable abomination. So, needless to say, my interest was more than piqued when the Times ran an article on the case that could determine the fate of the practice for years to come: The case of the Spruce 1 project in West Virginia, one of the largest-ever mountaintop removal proposals ever. The federal government is currently mulling whether or not to veto the project, which was approved during the Bush administration.

Here's the NY Times: the Environmental Protection Agency under the Obama administration, in a break with President George W. Bush's more coal-friendly approach, has threatened to halt or sharply scale back the project known as Spruce 1. The agency asserts that the project would irrevocably damage streams and wildlife and violate the Clean Water Act.

Because it is one of the largest mountaintop mining projects ever and because it has been hotly disputed for a dozen years, Spruce 1 is seen as a bellwether by conservation groups and the coal industry.

Whether or not mountaintop removal mining damages streams and wildlife, and whether it violates the Clean Water Act, is essentially moot in the decision -- it absolutely does each of those things. There's no question about that. The Times report points out that under the current proposal, at least 7 miles of river and stream would filled in with blasted materials, many of which are toxic. The real question is indeed one of politics, though not in the manner of the coal advocacy group quoted in the piece, which says the only reasons the project has been halted are "political; the only thing that has changed is the administration."

That's not quite right -- in addition to a change of administration, so too has a desire to take the latest science on the subject into account. And the recent science is devastating -- in one of the most frankly-worded scientific papers I've ever read, 12 leading US scientists called for the practice to be flat-out banned. No, the politics that matter here are those that bind the Democratic Party to the coal industry and to unions -- delivering a major blow to mountaintop removal mining delivers a major blow to the mining industry, the way they see it. And at a time when Dems are faltering in the polls, those ties are given serious attention.

So, it's unlikely that we'll have that decision from the feds before the November elections. Here's to hoping the EPA's better senses win out -- nobody, not Democrats or Republicans, wants once-pristine mountains to look like this.

WATER

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EPA Launches New Water Conservation Campaign....By Driving a Car Cross-Country? (*Treehugger*)

July 17, 2010

The EPA is launching a great water consumption awareness campaign called We're For Water. We're definitely excited that the organization is working hard to show Americans how we can curb our water use and conserve resources. Goodness knows we need it, with the average American consuming an estimated 150 gallons of water a day through household use, food, and product consumption. But part of the campaign is a cross-country road trip during which "Flo" stops at 16 cities to raise awareness. Couldn't the EPA have come up with a way to promote the campaign without burning fossil fuels?

The EPA announced this week, "The program, in collaboration with its partner, American Water, will spread the word about saving water by traveling cross-country, stopping at national landmarks and educating consumers about WaterSense labeled products. WaterSense products use about 20 percent less water than standard models."

The road trip portion of the campaign sends a hybrid car bouncing all over the US. Sure, it's a hybrid car, but for a cross country trip where most the miles are highway miles, that does little to reduce the fuel consumption. And really, how exciting is it to have the EPA arrive in your town? Umm...not very. They certainly could have made this a virtual road trip or come up with something much less carbon intensive. After all, we want to decrease our dependence on oil, and nearly three quarters of oil goes to transportation. It's not a great idea to try and set people straight in one area, while setting a bad example in another.

This rather dumb FAIL aside, the campaign itself sounds useful. The EPA is promoting WaterSense labeled products and water-efficient behaviors among consumers, focusing on three simple steps - "check, twist, replace."

· Check toilets for silent leaks by putting a few drops of food coloring in the tank; if the color shows up in the bowl indicating a leak, fixing it may be as simple as replacing the toilet's flapper.

· Twist on a WaterSense labeled bathroom faucet aerator to use 30 percent less water without a noticeable difference in flow.

· Replace a showerhead with a WaterSense labeled model that uses less water and energy, but still has all the power of a water-hogging model.

The campaign asks consumers for their pledge to do these things and conserve water. The website is filled with information on water efficiency and resources, including a water calculator, and emphasizes why conservation is absolutely necessary:

There's a reason that water has become a national priority. A recent government survey showed at least 36 states are anticipating local, regional, or statewide water shortages by 2013. But by using water more efficiently, we can help preserve water supplies for future generations, save money, and protect the environment. WaterSense is making it easier to identify water-efficient products and practices.

However, water conservation is also about more than just the average American reducing their consumption. Making our water use sustainable for the long term means entirely rethinking our

infrastructure for water distribution, as well as where we use water. Agriculture and manufacturing are two of the biggest consumers of water. So rather than focusing on things like changing out shower heads and adding faucet aerators, we should be focusing on buying local food grown with smart irrigation practices, consuming less meats, and buying less stuff in general. Looking at the big picture of our water consumption problems is where the real education and changes need to happen; still, starting with these steps on the consumer level will help get the ball rolling in raising awareness of our water crisis.