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

AIR

Lowell Feld: Stop the Senate from Gutting the Clean Air Act! (*Huffington Post*)

Just when you thought the U.S. Senate couldn't do any less for clean energy and the environment than it's (not) done so far, we now face the real possibility of what would amount to a "stop-work order"on the 40-year-old, wildly successful (e.g., studies finding benefits outweighing costs at a 40:1 ratio), Clean Air Act.

That's right: Believe it or not, Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) is moving ahead with a sequel to Sen. Lisa Murkowski's nefarious attempt , earlier this summer, to gut the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s power to protect the public health from dangerous pollutants, including harmful greenhouse gases. Just as bad, Rockefeller's proposal would keep America addicted to oil and other old, polluting energy technologies, while delaying or derailing our switch to a clean, prosperous energy economy.

Essentially, what Rockefeller is proposing would tell the EPA -- at least for two years, although we know that justice delayed is often justice denied! -- that it has to be asleep at the switch, that it must not hold polluters accountable, that it must look the other way whole Big Oil and Big Coal trash the environment. Is that the lesson the Senate learned from the Gulf of Mexico disaster? Really?

Fortunately, not everyone is so clueless as the U.S. Senate appears to be right now. For instance, in yesterday's Politico , two energy investors -- one Democrat, one Republican -- explained what's at stake in clear, compelling language:

We are not experts in vote counting or horse trading. But we do know how investors and markets will respond if Congress ultimately fails to put a market-based price on carbon. The response from capital will be brutal: Money will flow to places like China, Europe and India — and U.S. jobs will go with it.

The path to creating more U.S. jobs is simple: Pass legislation that eliminates uncertainty and levels the playing field, and investors will fund projects that create good jobs here at home. Rules bring certainty, certainty spurs investment, and investment creates jobs.

Take it from investors: Removing the uncertainty, and taking a more thoughtful approach to energy policy by putting a market price on carbon, can bring home new investments and jobs — and ensure that America leads the clean energy economy.

Instead, it now looks like the Senate not only won't be moving us forwards, but instead will be trying to move us significantly -- and disastrously -- backwards. What's truly stunning about this possibility is that, right now, the science of climate change is clearer and more disturbing than ever. Heat waves are getting worse , the ice caps are shrinking faster than ever and scientists are

telling us that the world is setting new temperature records almost every month, every year and every decade. In addition, the results of our insatiable thirst for fossil fuels were demonstrated starkly and tragically, both in a West Virginia coal mine as well as in the Gulf of Mexico, on TV screens all across America in recent months. As if all this isn't bad enough, we also could run out of water .

The American people know this situation can't go on. In fact, recent polls show large majorities supporting an energy bill that would "limit pollution, invest in domestic energy sources and encourage companies to use and develop clean energy... by charging energy companies for carbon pollution in electricity or fuels like gas." In other words, this is a case where good policy -- limiting greenhouse gas emissions, enhancing our national security, safeguarding public health, jumpstarting a clean energy revolution -- and good politics – strong poll results for doing just that - appear to align. Yet, the U.S. Senate appears ready to ignore both good policy and good politics, and actually move to make matters worse by gutting the EPA and letting polluters like BP off the hook.

Don't let them do it. Call your Senators right now and tell them “hell no” to the "Let Polluters Pollute with Impunity Act.” Also, while you're at it, call the White House and tell President Obama that, if such a measure reaches his desk, he will veto it -- no ifs, ands or buts.

EPA reviewing air pollution rules for oil, gas (*Huffington Post*)

DENVER — Federal air pollution standards for the oil and gas industry are sorely outdated amid ramped up drilling, leaving thousands of emissions sources 'under the radar,' citizens groups said Wednesday.

The Environmental Protection Agency is reconsidering air pollution rules for oil and gas operations as part of a settlement with WildEarth Guardians and the San Juan Citizens Alliance. The groups say existing rules aren't enough to handle increased drilling and don't account for advances in technology that could reduce emissions.

The EPA is getting the public involved in its review by holding meetings in Arlington, Texas, on Aug. 2 and in Denver on Aug. 3 for government, industry and citizens to weigh in.

The EPA has agreed to finalize updates to three sets of rules under the Clean Air Act by Nov. 30, 2011.

The oil and gas industry continues to be one of the heaviest regulated industries, said Kathleen Sgamma, the Western Energy Alliance's director of government affairs. The group's members already are working with the Western Regional Air Partnership – an effort of tribal and state governments and federal agencies – in voluntarily providing detailed emissions data to state regulators.

'We want to make sure to reduce emissions from oil and gas production,' she said.

Mike Eisenfeld of the San Juan Citizens Alliance said loopholes in existing rules have allowed thousands of air pollution sources to operate without permits. He said inventories are needed along with studies on public health.

The Four Corners area has thousands of wells that are 'major contributors' to ozone levels that are edging close to federal limits, Eisenfeld said.

Sgamma said the industry accounts for only a small percentage of emissions of specific pollutants.

Artisanal cheesemaker Deborah Rogers operates a goat dairy in the Fort Worth, Texas, area, where residents have been concerned about health effects of drilling on the Barnett Shale. She is hoping the EPA decides to ban flaring, in which excess vapors are burned off from wells. She called it an antiquated process and said technology is available today to help capture emissions.

Other environmental groups said they hope for more monitoring, studies of cumulative effects of toxins, and limiting the use of open waste pits in favor of closed-loop systems.

Sgamma said there is no one-size-fits-all solution, since conditions can vary for exploratory wells and production wells and from basin to basin.

'A lot of variables go into deciding what controls and technologies can be used,' she said.

Online:
EPA's notice of public meeting: http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/2010-17042.htm

Breathe deeply... clear the mind of distractions... and focus (*DAILY KOS*)

So what would count as doing something effective about abrupt climate change? This diary, then, is a thought experiment: what if we actually made abrupt climate change itself a priority rather than mere window-dressing for another legislative report?

I suppose this diary is prompted by RLMiller's diary of Monday: the word is out that we're not going to have "effective climate change legislation," and so the pundits are placing hopes in the EPA or something like that.

But I don't see the point in being pessimistic. This all looks to me like an opportunity to step back and judge what really needs to be done. At the very least, this diary can count as a laundry list of things to be done while the blogosphere, here, is waiting for the next opportunity to influence legislation.

My central point here is that we haven't really focused our minds upon abrupt climate change, and so if we're going to have a hiatus, here, we can use this as an opportunity to understand how we've seriously underestimated the problem of climate change. There will be rather extreme

consequences to the massive alteration of Earth's atmosphere by the burning of what will be at least a trillion barrels of oil by industrial society.

The obvious evidence for our underestimate of the problem is that none of the legislation being proposed would really have been effective. Cap-and-trade wouldn't have saved us. Fab new technologies won't save us either. Carbon taxes can be evaded through accounting tricks or by moving the "carbon consumption" outside of the taxed area.

The fossil fuel "producers" of the world are not going to "produce" 85 million bbls./day of oil, an equal carbon-equivalent of coal, and so on, and then nobody's going to consume it. Thus the answer is simple: to reduce "carbon consumption" you have to restrict "carbon production." Ah, but the "carbon producers" are not going to accept the opportunity costs of leaving the grease in the ground. The Saudis have already told the world this, before Copenhagen. Thus we need a system which will make the break with capitalism, and forge an international agreement to abandon the coal mines, plug up the oil wells, give up on natural gas.

Moreover, we haven't considered the problem of abrupt climate change holistically, which would be to include all of the other damages we've inflicted upon the planet through industry. A summary of the ways in which human industry depletes the planet's biodiversity resources can be found in John McMurtry's 2002 essay "The Planetary Life Crisis: Its Systemic Cause and Ground of Resolution" from Miller and Westra's Just Ecological Integrity: The Ethics of Maintaining Planetary Life. Industry has declared war upon the Earth's ecosystems, one if by land, two if by sea, and three if by air. The combined effects of industrial activity upon planet Earth deserve our study both 1) as to what we are doing to the planet and 2) as to alternative, "post-capitalist" ways of subsisting upon planet Earth which would not be so costly.

Doing the complete analysis of this, the "metabolism of society and nature," will be something much more thorough than merely lobbying our legislators for climate change legislation. It is, however, a prerequisite for better legislation. We need to be adopting a holistic goal of ending the metabolic rift between the development of human society, and the rhythms of change in the natural world.

We aren't, of course "there yet." And, just as we can't rely upon the legislators as a crutch to solve our environmental problems, so also can't we rely upon the experts to solve our environmental problems for us either. The experts, as Kees van der Pijl reminds us, form a "cadre class," which is responsible to two masters: 1) the future of the world, which would certainly be impacted by climate change, and 2) their paymasters in the various foundations and other employing agencies, who demand a sort of political allegiance (or at least a refusal to attack) in exchange for their monies. Thus the experts may grant us the data we need to say that there's a problem, yet may also not be willing to describe the revolutionary solution necessary to solve the problem.

One way of proceeding democratically is what Richard Kahn calls "ecopedagogy," and Kahn's ideas are outlined in his recommended new book "Critical Pedagogy, Ecoliteracy, and Planetary Crisis." Kahn's ideas fall within what is now the mainstream of critical pedagogy -- the central focus is upon education as the function of a social movement to change society, leaving

education as the function of an inequitable, unjust, and destructive society to its own devices. Do we have educational institutions dedicated to the social change necessary to solve the abrupt climate change problem? Can we create such institutions?

So what I'm saying, then, is that we really need to spend time with society, with its "mainstream" members, if we hope to refocus the whole of society toward the goal of a solution to abrupt climate change. "Mainstream" society, it can be assumed, has other priorities. If the Senate could not be bothered to do anything about abrupt climate change, it's not likely that a lot of public pressure was put upon said Senate.

It's clear, then, that there are things getting in the way of the public's interest in abrupt climate change. The most important of these has got to be the economy. How shall I put this delicately? We are at a time in history in which the super-rich are consolidating their gains while the middle class is disappearing. People are concerned about losing their jobs, about working conditions, about being able to appreciate the "good things in life" in their time off. And it is generally understood that this is what people should be doing with their lives -- politics junkies are generally regarded as a marginal subset of a society which pursues "leisure" in the hours not devoted to "work" (or at least to looking for work, an even more painful activity per se). So we are in a bind here. How are we to pay attention to abrupt climate change if we are too busy making a living? Perhaps a more equitable economy would allow us to focus upon abrupt climate change.

Moreover, we really haven't exhausted all of the strategies available to us for "doing something" about abrupt climate change. Awhile ago I suggested a field of study around this topic -- post-capitalist environmental design. The ideas of the 21st century socialists need to be applied in this country. And so on.

So you can see that there's no need to mope, nor to spend a lot of time with "Democrat cowardice" (unlike Something The Dog Said, I didn't have illusions), and plenty to do before we have the critical mass necessary to change world society. But first: breathe deeply... clear the mind of distractions... and focus.

NOAA: Toxic Air from BP Spill Measured in U.S. Cities (*DAILY KOS*)

The toxic effects are making themselves known on people living in cities on the mainland U.S. and on Gulf shellfish miles from the site of the BP oil spill. The evaporating oil slick, which is itself the major source of deadly aromatic hydrocarbon emissions, will continue spreading for months after the gusher is plugged, according to scientists.

While BP is expected to finally plug the Deep Horizon well as soon as next week to great fanfare, the toxic effects will continue for months and years to come.

http://www.envirotech-online.com/...

BP spill 'having effect on US air quality'

The BP oil spill has had a negative effect on the air quality of US cities, a report has shown.

Scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) released details of their research into the air quality of states close to the Gulf of Mexico explosion that occurred on April 20th.

They revealed that 15 to 70 kilometres downwind from the location of the spill, there were concentrations of chemicals in the air that were much higher than should be expected in urban areas.

In a sampling of a wide spectrum of pollutants, The NOAA report went on to state that as far away as 50 miles from the spill site extraordinarily high levels of hydrocarbons had been detected: http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/...

Scientists found common air pollutants, such as ozone, nitrogen oxides and carbon monoxide, in amounts typical of urban areas in U.S. cities. However, 15 to 70 kilometers downwind from the oil spill, concentrations of certain hydrocarbons were much higher than found in typical polluted air.

The health effects of aromatic hydrocarbon emissions from oil slicks, such as benzene and other known carcinogens, are well understood. Crude oil slicks, as they evaporate, naturally emit high percentages of benzene, the the most deadly aromatic hydrocarbons discussed below. The initial explosion and burning, as well as the later intentional flaring (burning) of methane and other hydrocarbons which BP did for weeks at the well site, also added a combustion emissions plume to the toxic mix:

http://www.exponent.com/... The petroleum constituents of primary interest to human health have been the aromatic hydrocarbons (i.e., benzene, ethylbenzene, toluene, and xylenes), polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), gasoline additives (e.g., MTBE, TBA), and combustion emissions from fuels (e.g., carbon monoxide, benzene, acetaldehyde, formaldehyde, diesel particulates).

Aromatic Hydrocarbons and Polynuclear Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAH)

The aromatic hydrocarbons are identified as chemicals of interest for health risk assessments at most petroleum-contaminated sites and for sites affected by petroleum solvent. Benzene is the only aromatic hydrocarbon classified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and other health and environmental agencies as a "known human carcinogen," and therefore, is the primary focus of many petroleum hydrocarbon risk assessments. Exponent has conducted hundreds of site risk assessments where benzene was a chemical of concern. The potential exposure to benzene at a petroleum-contaminated site depends on the concentrations of benzene in the soil, water, and air, and the frequency and duration of expected human contact with the contaminated media. If the petroleum release was gasoline from an underground tank, benzene will likely be found in soils and possibly also in shallow groundwater and air. The volatilization of benzene in

subsurface soils and shallow groundwater and its migration into buildings (vapor intrusion), have recently become a risk assessment focus that has led to the reopening of Records of Decision (RODs) at a number of sites. Benzene and the other aromatic hydrocarbons are taken up through the skin, lung, and digestive system, so all three routes of exposure (dermal uptake, inhalation, and incidental ingestion) need to be considered in assessing health risks.

The BP spill is also expected to have lasting effects on the Gulf food chain, as well. PAH residues have been previously observed in mussels in shallow sedimentary layers more than 15 kms from the source:

http://linkinghub.elsevier.com/... Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) have been determined, by glass capillary gas chromatography, in two species of bivalves (Mytilus edulis and Modiolus modiolus) and sediments of Saudafjorden, Norway. The PAH observed are derived from waste effluents from a ferro alloy smelter. Up to 34 PAH compounds were identified, including some reported to be carcinogenic. The concentrations decreased rapidly with distance from the source and with sediment depth, but could be traced more than 15 km from the source.

Don't get out your party hats, just yet, BP. The spreading, distant, deadly impact of this catastrophe has just started to be realized.

Breaking News: Coal Deadlier Than Biomass (*Daily KOS*)

Letters support carbon neutrality of biomass
In a letter to U.S. House and Senate leaders last week, 114 of the nation's leading environmental scientists express concern over the proposed U.S. EPA's Tailoring Rule equating biogenic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions with fossil fuel emissions.

See, see, see, that tops the 90 scientists supporting the Manomet hoax.

No word on how many of the 114 work for Monsanto.

On the other hand, Monsanto isn't in the business of growing franken monster trees that will surely eat the planet. At least Monsanto isn't in that horrid business as far as I know.

The carbon dioxide released from the combustion or decay of woody biomass is part of the global cycle of biogenic carbon and does not increase the amount of carbon in circulation, according to the scientists. Equating biogenic carbon emissions with that of fossil fuels is not consistent with good science and could stop the development of new emission-reducing biomass energy facilities, they add. "It could also encourage existing biomass energy facilities to convert to fossil fuel or cease producing renewable energy. This is counter to our country's renewable energy and climate mitigation goals."

Aww what's a few trillion more tons of CO2 and methane in the atmosphere if it makes the Sierra Club happy? Who needs good science when we have political science?

the scientists argue that biomass power facilities generally contribute to a reduction of GHGs beyond just displacement of fossil fuels, as the use of forest fuels in modern boilers eliminates methane emissions from incomplete oxidation following open burning, landfilling, or decomposing, which occurs in the absence of a higher and better use for the material.

Dirty pool, science guys. Not fair attacking Mother Nature.

So how does one choose rationally between scientists?

Thinking is my suggestion.

If that is out of the question, try jobs converting fossil fuel plants and engines to biomass.

If that doesn't grab you, I am out of ideas.

Best, Terry

BP SPILL

Federal criminal probe focuses on oil firms and their regulators (*DAILY KOS*)

A team of federal investigators known as the "BP squad" is assembling in New Orleans to conduct a wide-ranging criminal probe that will focus on at least three companies and examine whether their cozy relations with federal regulators contributed to the oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, according to law enforcement and other sources.

The squad at the FBI offices includes investigators from the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Coast Guard and other federal agencies, the sources said. In addition to BP, the firms at the center of the inquiry are Transocean, which leased the Deepwater Horizon rig to BP, and engineering giant Halliburton, which had finished cementing the well only 20 hours before the rig exploded April 20, sources said.

The investigators are looking for any improprieties involving MMS:

One emerging line of inquiry, sources said, is whether inspectors for the Minerals Management Service, the federal agency charged with regulating the oil industry -- which is itself investigating the disaster -- went easy on the companies in exchange for money or other inducements. A series of federal audits has documented the MMS's close relationship with the industry.

One law enforcement official said criminal investigators will look for evidence that MMS inspectors were bribed or promised industry jobs in exchange for lenient treatment. "Every instinct I have tells me there ought to be numerous indictable cases in that connection between MMS and the industry," said this official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the investigation is unfolding.

(Emphasis added.)

According to the article, it will probably take at least a year for any indictments to flow from the investigation. Although that may feel like a year too long, holding people who broke the law accountable for their actions will be well worth the wait.

PESTICIDES

Bedbug Plan Called For By New York (*Huffington Post*)

NEW YORK — One of every 15 New Yorkers battled bedbugs last year, officials said Wednesday as they announced a plan to fight the spreading infestation, including a public-awareness campaign and a top entomologist to head the effort.

The bloodsucking pests, which are not known to spread disease but can cause great mental anguish with their persistent and fast-growing infestations, have rapidly multiplied throughout New York and many other U.S. cities in recent years.

Health officials and pest control specialists nationwide report surges in sightings, bites and complaints. The Environmental Protection Agency hosted its first-ever bedbug summit last year.

In New York City, the pests have been discovered in theaters, clothing stores, office buildings, housing projects and posh apartments.

The stigma of having bedbugs – whose bites leave itchy red welts – and the elusive nature of the pests make it impossible to fully understand the problem, experts say.

But in 2009, for the first time, Mayor Michael Bloomberg's administration included a question about bedbugs on its community health survey, and it revealed the finding to The Associated Press on Wednesday: More than 6 percent of New Yorkers who responded said they had battled the pests in the last year.

The figure would equal roughly 400,000 adults in the city, the health department said.

Data previously has been limited to government statistics on complaints and surveys of private pest-control companies, which have also reported nationwide spikes.

The Bloomberg administration fielded 537 complaints about the bugs in fiscal 2004. In fiscal 2009, there were nearly 11,000.

"This is happening globally, and I don't think anybody has figured out exactly why," said Daniel Kass, the city's deputy commissioner for environmental health. "So what we're left with is managing them and keeping them from spreading. They're going to be with us for some time."

Bedbugs are about the size of an apple seed and burrow into many more places than beds. They can slip into floor cracks, wall outlets, picture frames, lamps – any tiny space.

People who have bedbugs often never see them. The most obvious signs are bites, blood on bedsheets and their waste, which looks like black pepper. They are known for being extremely difficult to eradicate, and can go a year without feeding.

Bedbugs were nearly dormant for decades, and the recent comeback has experts scratching their heads. Some attribute the resurgence to an increase in global travel and the prohibition of potent pesticides like DDT.

New York convened a government advisory board last year to study the problem and make recommendations.

The report said one major roadblock to stopping the bedbug spread is lack of knowledge about prevention and the patchy and sometimes erroneous information about treatment.

"If you have termites, you know how to deal with it. If you see a rat, you know who to call. This is confusing," said City Council Speaker Christine Quinn. "The biggest issue is lack of clarity and not having any actual sense of what the next step is and where you go to get that."

Carol Gittens said she discovered bedbugs in her Brooklyn apartment two years ago, and estimates she has spent at least $3,000 replacing her things.

"We had to throw everything out – mattresses, clothes," she said.

The apartment was thoroughly cleaned and she thought she had eliminated them. But a neighbor recently reported she has bedbugs, and Gittens said she might have them in her apartment again.

The high cost of throwing out infested belongings and hiring exterminators contributes to bedbugs' spread, officials said. Many people, particularly those with low incomes or in public housing, cannot afford to do what it takes.

Acting on the report's recommendations, New York City said Wednesday it was re-appropriating $500,000 of health department money to begin the first phase of a bedbug battle plan, which is mostly concentrated on information, outreach and the creation of an entomologist-led bedbug team.

Some of the money will go toward creating an online bedbug portal where New Yorkers can find information about avoiding the pests as well as how to treat their homes. The city already has a rat-information portal.

Many people are unaware they have the bugs, officials said, and end up spreading them by carrying them on their clothing or discarding personal items that have the bugs.

Travelers also need to be more vigilant, the city says.

"Everyone has got to get used to the idea that they have got to check for them periodically," Kass said. "People who travel should look at the rooms they're staying in. They should check their clothing. There are good preventive measures."

Experts recommend looking for bugs with a bright flashlight, and using a hot hair dryer to flush them out of hiding places and cracks.

Bedding, linens, curtains, rugs and clothes from infested homes must be washed in hot water. Mattresses, furniture and floors must be vacuumed, and vacuum bags should be immediately disposed in sealed plastic bags. Hiring a certified exterminator to apply pesticides is also recommended.

Officials also said the city would adopt the report's recommendation of working to establish protocol for disposing of infested furniture and other personal items.

The report also suggested more work should be done by agencies that serve lower-income New Yorkers, and public housing infestations should be addressed more quickly. But at a time when the city is cutting services and shrinking its job force to save money, those goals are likely not immediately achievable.

WATER

NASA Satellite Monitors Watershed Pollution from Space (*Treehugger*)

NASA is a constant help in monitoring water supplies and conditions, from groundwater supplies in California to ocean dead zones worldwide. But every day the technology gets more helpful, and with USEPA estimating that over 20,000 water bodies within the United States do not meet water quality standards, it's a good thing that the latest boost from NASA goes to watersheds. NASA satellites are improving pollution monitoring for the Chesapeake Bay, an ecosystem in need of all the help it can get, and other watersheds around the nation.

According to a report from the American Society of Agronomy, part of the Clean Water Act of 1972 requires monitoring how much pollution can be carried by a body of water before it is

deemed polluted. The USEPA Created Better Assessment Science Integrating Nonpoint Sources, or BASINS, as a tool to help accomplish this. By using both satellite and ground-based observations from NASA and imputing the data in BASINS, states have watershed pollution monitoring models. The new access to NASA satellite data replaces data that used to come from weather stations, which could miss important factors like (of all things) precipitation data. The new, more precise precipitation data has "dramatically improved water quality model performance over the default weather stations," states ASA.

Seven watersheds in the Chesapeake Bay drainage basin were selected to test out the new data. This area has had an especially hard time with pollution levels, with the EPA actually sued in an effort to get pollution levels down. Recently Philippe Cousteau's Azure World and the University of Virginia created a game that allows users to create scenarios from new government policies to housing developments and the game models what would happen to the watershed over 20 years' time. It can be used to explore and test policy choices and research in complex systems modeling. That, combined with the new, more accurate information pooled by NASA can go a long way in helping the bay recover, and possibly spread valuable lessons to other imperiled watersheds.

Up To 1 Million Gallons of Oil Leak Into Michigan River From Pipeline - Largest in Midwest History (*Treehugger*)

Here we go again... Detroit News reports that Environmental Protection Agency officials have said that as much as one million gallons of oil has leaked from a pipeline owned by Enbridge Energy Partners into a creek flowing into the Kalamazoo River near Battle Creek, Michigan. This would make it the largest oil spill in the history of the Midwest.

The oil spilled into Talmadge Creek, which flows northwest into the Kalamazoo River. The site is in Calhoun County's Marshall Township near Battle Creek and about 60 miles southeast of Grand Rapids. The pipe may have been leaking for many hours before it was originally reported to have burst Monday morning. Marshall Township fire officials responded to complaints of an oily smell from residents. More than 20 homes have been evacuated.

The spill is currently being investigated by the EPA and the National Transportation Safety Board.

UPDATES: Slightly lower amounts of oil, likely won't reach Lake Michigan; owners don't know what caused spill

Though initial reports placed the amount of oil spilled from the Enbridge pipeline as high as one million gallons, all subsequent reports have estimated the amount of oil leaked in the 800,000-840,000 gallon range.

If there's some good news in that beyond the decrease in size, it's that according to a spokesperson for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, quoted in the Lansing State Journal, the Kalamazoo River spill will likely not reach Lake Michigan. Mary Detloff said the

spill can be corralled near Morrow Lake, just east of Kalamazoo, and vacuum trucks will be able to suck off the oil.

Fish Washing Up Dead, Geese Coated in Oil

Though experts say it's too early to assess the full environmental damage, dead fish are washing ashore, Canada geese have been spotted coated in oil, and the expected impact on invertebrates, amphibians and any mammals coming into contact with oil at water's edge is likely to be significant.

The owners of the 30"-wide pipeline, Houston-based Enbdrige Energy Partners, still do not know exactly what caused the leakage.

Pipeline Brings Oil From Western Canada, Through US, Back to Canada

The spill was first reported at 8:45 Monday morning at a Lakehead pipeline pumping station just outside of Marshall, Michigan, very roughly at the two-thirds point of the pipeline's 1,900-mile length through the United States

The Lakehead pipeline system is part of a 3,300-mile long pipeline system that enters the United States in North Dakota, crosses through Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan, before cutting back into Canada, ending in Montreal. One of the largest pipeline systems in the world, it can deliver 2 million barrels of crude oil (84 million gallons) to refineries in the Midwest and eastern Canada.

12% of US Daily Crude Imports Done by Enbridge

Enbridge Energy is intimately connected with expanding production of oil from the Alberta tar sands and delivering it to the United States--their 2009 annual report states that they transport 71% of western Canadian crude exports, satisfying 12% of US daily crude oil imports.

And spills are par for the course.

The Sierra Club quotes Elizabeth Sherman, of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe in Minnesota:

The Enbridge pipeline runs through the Leech Lake Reservation, and there have been several spills outside our town that Enbridge hasn't been able to clean up. We're close the Itasca State Park, the headwaters of the Mississippi River, and the oil from these spills has gotten down into one of our two aquifers and contaminated the water in the top aquifer. The oil is still there, the water is still contaminated, and the damage is still being done. Tribal resident's wells are being contaminated, and now there's a restriction on how much fish we can eat per week because of mercury pollution.

According to stats gathered by Indigenous Peoples Issues & Resources, "between 1999 and 2008, across all of Endridge's operations there were 610 oil spills that released close to 132,000 barrels of hydrocarbons into the environment."

More on Enbridge: Out on the Tar Sands Mainline: Mapping Enbridge's Web of Pipelines

Overnight News Digest: UN says clean water a human right (*DAILY KOS*)

UN declares access to clean water a human right

The UN General Assembly on Wednesday recognized access to clean water and sanitation as a human right.

After more than 15 years of debate on the issue, 122 countries voted in favor of a compromise Bolivian resolution enshrining the right, while 41 abstained.

The text "declares the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of the right to life."

The resolution laments the fact that 884 million people lack access to safe drinking water and that more 2.6 billion do not have access to basic sanitation.

Yahoo: 152 die as plane crashes in rainy Pakistan hills

A passenger jet that officials suspect veered off course in monsoon rains and thick clouds crashed into hills overlooking Pakistan's capital Wednesday, killing all 152 people on board and scattering body parts and twisted metal far and wide.

The Airblue jet's crash was the deadliest ever in Pakistan, and just the latest tragedy to jolt a country that has suffered numerous deaths in recent years due to al-Qaida and Taliban attacks. At least two U.S. citizens were on the plane, which carried mostly Pakistanis.

The plane left the southern city of Karachi at 7:45 a.m. for a two-hour flight to Islamabad and was trying to land when it lost contact with the control tower, said Pervez George, a civil aviation official. Airblue is a private airline based in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city.

The aircraft, an Airbus A321, crashed some 15 kilometers from the airport, scorching a wide stretch of the Margalla Hills, including a section behind Faisal Mosque, one of Islamabad's most prominent landmarks. Twisted metal wreckage hung from trees and lay scattered across the ground. Smoke rose from the scene as helicopters hovered.

CNN: French couple held after bodies of 8 infants found

French national police Tuesday detained a couple after the bodies of eight newborn babies were found in northern France, some in a home and others in the garden of another home, the French Interior Ministry said.

Gendarmes found the remains in the town of Villers-au-Tertre.

Authorities scheduled a news conference for Thursday morning.

BBC: Greece orders striking lorry drivers back to work

The Greek government has used a rare emergency order to force lorry drivers back to work after a three-day strike.

The drivers have until later on Thursday to return to the roads or face arrest and the loss of their licenses.

Most petrol stations in Athens are out of fuel and shops and factories are running low on supplies.

The drivers oppose government plans to open the industry to more competition as part of austerity measures agreed with the IMF and the EU.

Yahoo News: Third most-wanted Nazi suspect charged in Germany

The world's third most-wanted Nazi suspect, who lived undisturbed for decades after World War II, has been charged in Germany with participating in the murder of 430,000 Jews while serving as a low-ranking guard at a death camp.

Samuel Kunz, 88, had long been ignored by the German justice system, partly because of a lack of interest in going after relatively minor Nazi figures. But in the past 10 years, a younger generation of prosecutors has sought to bring all surviving suspects to justice.

Authorities recently stumbled over Kunz's case as they were studying old documents from German post-wars trials about an SS training camp named Trawniki. The papers were being reviewed in connection with the trial of John Demjanjuk, the 90-year-old retired autoworker on trial in Munich for allegedly serving as a guard at the infamous Sobibor camp.

Kunz was named the No. 3 suspect in April by the Simon Wiesenthal Center. He ranked fairly low in the Nazi hierarchy, but he was among the most-wanted suspects because of the large number of Jews he is accused of helping to kill.

The Globe and Mail: Plants at base of ocean food chain in decline, study finds

Microscopic phytoplankton that form the foundation of the marine food chain are declining, according to a new Canadian study that indicates that the ocean's ecosystem and fisheries could be changing.

Researchers at Dalhousie University conducted the first global study of the populations of these microscopic organisms in the past century and found the declines – averaging about 1 per cent a

year, and approximately 40 per cent since 1950 – are correlated with increases in sea surface temperatures. The study, a three-year analysis, is being published Thursday in the journal Nature.

"What we're looking at is the planet changing, and I think it's always hard to figure out a cause and effect of that, and what those implications are," said Curtis Suttle, a professor of earth and ocean sciences at the University of British Columbia. "Undoubtedly, that does have implications in terms of how oceanic food webs are structured, and that could have impacts on fisheries."

Phytoplankton act as the grass of the ocean and form the base of the aquatic food chain. The organisms live at the surface of the water, and are the main source of food for zooplankton, which in turn form the diet of fish and other sea creatures that are eaten by the bigger fish, large whales and humans that occupy the top of the food chain.

BBC: Hip hope from stem cell technique

US researchers have developed a promising new technique that might one day enable doctors to regrow broken or diseased joints in patients.

Writing in the The Lancet, US researchers say they have regrown the forelimb thigh joint of rabbits using their own stem cells.

Scientists say they have shown "proof of principle" for the technique which could replace hips It was the first time an entire joint surface had been regenerated with the return of functions, they said.

The research could benefit patients with damaged hips, shoulders or knees.

WOOD TV8: EPA: 1M+ gallons of oil have spilled

Environmental Protection Agency says it believes more than a million gallons of oil may have leaked this week into a major southern Michigan waterway that leads to Lake Michigan.

The estimate reported Wednesday night from the EPA exceeds earlier estimates from the company responsible for the spill into Talmadge Creek, which runs into the Kalamazoo River, of about 819,000 gallons.

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson says in a statement the agency and Enbridge Inc. are taking action on the "serious spill."

The EPA says it's requested the Coast Guard make $2 million available to fund the federal government's operations in response to the spill. And the EPA will move additional vessels into the area within days to assist in the response.

CNN: Officials optimistic amid preparations to seal Gulf oil well

One hundred days after an oil well operated by BP ruptured in the Gulf of Mexico, and 13 days

after crews finished capping the well to contain the gushing crude, the man who is overseeing the federal response is optimistic that steps planned for the coming days will finally, permanently seal the well.

"The relief well, while it is deep, is something that has been done before," said retired Coast Guard Adm. Thad Allen. "The technologies involved here are not novel, but obviously, the depth is a challenge here. But we are optimistic we will get this done."

Allen offered that assessment as preparations proceeded for two efforts to kill the well about a mile below the surface -- first, sealing it from above by pouring down mud and cement in an operation known as "static kill," and then closing it off from below by an intersecting relief well.

The static kill could begin Sunday, while the relief well may be ready for the "bottom kill" effort five to seven days afterward.

Google: BP to face spill victims in US court for first time

British energy giant BP and victims of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill go to court for the first time Thursday during a session in Idaho that sets the stage for a potential trial of the century.

The proceedings in Boise, Idaho before the Multidistrict Litigation Panel (MDL Panel) will examine whether complaints submitted by around 200 plaintiffs can be consolidated, and determine where the hearings should take place and under which judge.

A decision is expected around two weeks after the hearing, but the session will give trial lawyers a test run for the arguments they will make during what could be years-long legal proceedings against BP.

The judges on the panel are expected to consolidate the complaints for practical reasons, but observers will pay close attention to where the panel orders the case be heard, and under which judge.

Yahoo: Judge blocks parts of Arizona immigration law

A federal judge stepped into the fight over Arizona's immigration law at the last minute Wednesday, blocking the heart of the measure and defusing a confrontation between police and thousands of activists that had been building for months.

The key issue before U.S. District Judge Susan Bolton in the case is as old as the nation itself: Does federal law trump state law? She indicated in her ruling that the federal government's case has a good chance at succeeding.

The Clinton appointee said the controversial sections should be put on hold until the courts resolve the issues, including parts that required officers to check a person's immigration status while enforcing other laws.

Bloomberg: Fallen Soldiers' Families Denied Cash as Insurers Profit

The package arrived at Cindy Lohman's home in Great Mills, Maryland, just two weeks after she learned that her son, Ryan, a 24-year-old Army sergeant, had been killed by a bomb in Afghanistan. It was a thick, 9-inch-by- 12-inch envelope from Prudential Financial Inc., which handles life insurance for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Inside was a letter from Prudential about Ryan's $400,000 policy. And there was something else, which looked like a checkbook. The letter told Lohman that the full amount of her payout would be placed in a convenient interest-bearing account, allowing her time to decide how to use the benefit.

"You can hold the money in the account for safekeeping for as long as you like," the letter said. In tiny print, in a disclaimer that Lohman says she didn't notice, Prudential disclosed that what it called its Alliance Account was not guaranteed by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., Bloomberg Markets magazine reports in its September issue.

CNN: Iraq veterans come home to a vice presidential welcome

Iraq veterans from the Army's 10th Mountain Division came home to Fort Drum, New York, Wednesday for a welcome that included Vice President Joe Biden.

"I've been looking forward to this day for a long time," Biden told members of the division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team. "I was looking forward to the day when I could stand with you as your mission came to an end.

"I say on behalf of the president of the United States of America: thank you, we owe you, we are indebted to you...welcome home."

Biden said that the welcome-home ceremony is one of the first of many, as the U.S. prepares to end its combat mission in Iraq in August.

Yahoo: Calif. firefighters gain on worst wildfire

Hundreds of firefighters gained ground Wednesday against the most destructive of two big wildfires that have burned homes and forced 2,300 people to evacuate mountain communities on the edge of the Mojave Desert and in the southern Sierra Nevada.

A 1,400-acre blaze that chased residents from the Old West Ranch community about 10 miles south of Tehachapi was 25 percent contained.

The firefighting command revised the number of destroyed structures down to 25, and Kern County Fire Department Battalion Chief Dean Boller said most were homes.

Fire officials initially estimated 30 to 40 homes were lost. Another 150 homes in the loosely connected community remained threatened.

Houston Chronicle: DNA clears man 27 years after rape conviction

A Houston man prosecutors now say is innocent is expected to be freed this week after serving more than 27 years in prison — the longest time behind bars of any Texan who has been exonerated — for a rape he did not commit.

Michael Anthony Green, 45, is expected to be in court Thursday where his attorney, Bob Wicoff, will ask that he be freed on bail while the case moves forward.

If freed, Green would be the eighth local man let out of prison in recent years, and the second in a week, after serving time for a crime he did not convict.

"He is innocent," Wicoff said. "We've got the bad guys too. We've pegged the bad guys."

Google: Congress narrows gap in cocaine sentences

Congress has changed a quarter-century-old law that has sent tens of thousands of blacks to prison for crack cocaine convictions while giving far more lenient treatment to those, mainly whites, caught with the same amount of the drug in powder form.

House passage of what was called the "fair sentencing act" sends the legislation to President Barack Obama for his signature.

The measure alters a 1986 law, enacted at the height of the crack cocaine epidemic, under which a person convicted of crack cocaine possession gets the same mandatory prison term as someone with 100 times the same amount of powder cocaine.

The legislation reduces that ratio to about 18-to-1.

How Safe Is Your Beach? NRDC's Latest Report Reveals Marine Health (*Treehugger*)

Every year, the Natural Resources Defense Council runs a survey of our beaches and marine habitats to find out which are safe and which need help to recover from abuse. Earlier in the month, the organization put out a map specifically of beaches closed by the Gulf oil disaster. But now, its 2010 report for all the beaches in the country is ready. As you plan your seaside vacation or pack a picnic for an afternoon on the sand, you might want to first check out the pollution status of your destination.

The 2010 Testing The Waters Report finds that "the number of closing and advisory days at ocean, bay and Great Lakes beaches topped 18,000 for the fifth consecutive year, confirming that our nation's beaches continue to suffer from bacterial pollution that puts swimmers at risk."

While nearly three quarters of the 2009 beach closings and advisories were due to bacteria levels exceeding health and safety standards, this year there's a new threat to many beaches -- oil. Because of the Gulf oil disaster, the new NRDC report is also covering current events at beaches, rather than the usual survey of the previous year's closings.

NRDC's report allows you to check on beach health state by state, looking at the beaches closest to you, or checking out beaches elsewhere.

The report also makes several recommendations for protecting beach-goers from getting sick while trying to enjoy the coastlines, including making the EPA tighten and enforce controls on sources of beachwater pollution, which is mainly stormwater runoff; getting congress to pass the Clean Coastal Environment and Publich Health Act and the Sewage Overflow Community Right-to-Know Act; putting a portion of tourism revenues to monitoring and prevention programs; and of course getting individuals to help clean up beach pollution, including using natural fertlizers in gardens, disposing of litter properly, and ditching toxic household products.

Here is a great video explaining the problems with stormwater runoff and why this is such a big focus for the NRDC when trying to eliminate beach pollution:

Keep up on more ocean news during Blue August on TreeHugger, where we cover everything from the health of the deep blue sea to the politics of the fresh water crisis.