U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
Blog Round-up

Prepared by the Office of Public Affairs

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Friday, January 8, 2010

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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With the internet, blogs, Twitter, forums - people are talking about EPA 24/7
Here's a sampling of what was said on Jan. 7, 2010:

NOTE: To read the entire blog entry, click on underlined URL. To learn more about the blogger, click on the name/link in first line. Notes and headings are from OPA.

New Ozone Standard Announcement

Proposed EPA Ozone Standard Based on Science, Not Politics, Science Group Says
Posted by: PoliticsInfo 4:00 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/6B0N5p
(Note: Union of Concerned Scientists: "Score one for science. I'm thrilled that the EPA is depoliticizing this regulation and letting the science inform what the rule should be. The EPA is rightfully following the advice of its Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee, a panel of experts -- advice the previous administration disregarded, putting at risk the health of millions of Americans. The CALL requires the EPA to base the standard solely on the best available scientific information, and the science shows the standard should be tightened. It's that clear-cut)

Making the air we breathe cleaner: EPA proposes stricter smog rules
Posted by: OutdoorCouncil 6:50 pm Full post:
http://wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org/blog/?p=370

Clean Air Watch Hails EPA Smog Proposal as Breath of Fresh Air - WASHINGTON-- The non-profit Clean Air Watch...
Posted by: NYHousemagazine 5:55 pm Full post: http://tinyurl.com/ybsd9fd

Reversing Bush, EPA Proposes Strictest Ever Smog Standards
Posted by: TreeHugger 5:50 pm Full post: http://tinyurl.com/yeb8z24

EPA Proposes Tighter Restrictions on Smog-Causing Emissions: The changes could cost industry $90 billion, and……
Posted by: SciTechFeed 6:45 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/8aa2Q3

EPA Cracks Down on Smog: Environmental Protection Agency head Lisa Jackson announced stricter standards regulations…..

Posted by: 1GlobalWarming 5:45 pm Full post: http://tinyurl.com/yeb8z24

EPA proposes its strictest ever smog standards
Posted by: urbanplanet 5:30 pm Full post:
http://www.urbanplanet.org/forums/topic/51098-epa-proposing-stricter-smog-standards/

RT @gogreenblog: RT breaking: EPA sets strict new smog limits -- Breathe easier!
Posted by: HuffPostGreen 5:30 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/7GtIQe

Which Industries Will the EPA's Proposed Smog Requirements Choke Out?
Posted by: johnfhunt 4:30 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/7rvWGy

Perry: EPA is targeting Texas…
Posted by: http://energyandenvironmentblog/dallasnews.com 3:41 pm Full post:
http://energyandenvironmentblog.dallasnews.com/archives/2010/01/perry-epa-is-targetting-texas.html
(Note: Gov. Rick Perry today issued the following statement: "The EPA's only consistent target has been the target on the backs of Texas workers and taxpayers. If this proposal is adopted, it will mark the second time in two years the federal government has imposed drastically reduced standards on states. We've worked hard and invested over $1 billion to reach compliance on the original target without sacrificing Texas jobs or economic momentum.)

News: U.S. EPA Proposes Stronger Ozone Standards
Posted by: Earthjustice 3:05 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/5jZKi8

Amer. Lung Association praises EPA's proposed new ozone standards, Big Oil calls them "politicized." Who do U believe?
Posted by: CleanAirChoice2 3:10 pm Full post: http://tinyurl.com/yay53lh

I can see clearly now, the smog is gone RT @YaleE360: EPA tightens limits on pollutants that cause smog
Posted by: grist 1:45 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/5o0v8M

EPA proposes tougher smog standards
Posted by: http://thehill.com/blogs 11:30 am Full post:
http://thehill.com//blogs/e2-wire/677-e2-wire/74733-epa-proposing-tougher-smog-standards

Mountain Top Mining

A dozen scientists push for no new mountaintop coal mining permits without big changes
Posted by: Revkin 6:00 pm Full post:

Blockbuster Study: Scientists Unveil a Mountain of Evidence Against Mountaintop Removal

Posted by: **AppVoices** 4:40 pm Full post: http://ow.ly/TOD4

EPA Backtracks on Mountaintop Coal Mining

Posted by: **triplepundit** 4:45 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/8Z9Q9R

ROUND-UP OF MAJOR BLOGS

AIR

EPA gets tough on smog (*Grist*)

7 Jan 2010 1:08 PM

by Agence France-Presse

The EPA sees the light.Photo: jordansmall via FlickrWASHINGTON—The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday proposed tougher standards for how much smog can be in the air, a move the agency said would save money and protect health, especially in children.

"EPA is stepping up to protect Americans from one of the most persistent and widespread pollutants we face. Smog in the air we breathe poses a very serious health threat, especially to children and individuals suffering from asthma and lung disease," EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson said in a statement. "It dirties our air, clouds our cities, and drives up our health care costs across the country."

The new standards would replace those set by the previous administration," which many believe were not protective enough of human health," the EPA said.

Under the proposals, the "primary" standard for smog—the standard to protect public health—would be tightened up to the strictest level ever in the United States—between 0.060 and 0.070 parts per million (ppm) measured over eight hours. The administration of former president George W. Bush in 2008 set the primary standard for smog at 0.075 ppm for eight hours.

The EPA also proposed setting a separate "secondary" standard designed to protect plants and trees from damage from repeated ozone exposure, which can reduce tree growth, damage leaves, and increase susceptibility to disease.

Smog, which is also known as ground-level ozone, forms when emissions from industrial facilities, power plants, landfills, and motor vehicles react in the sun.

Three public hearings will be held on the proposals, starting early next month.

If the new rules are adopted, said the EPA, they would result in health care savings of up to $100 billion; fewer premature deaths, visits to the emergency room, and days off work; and a drop in aggravated asthma and bronchitis cases.

MOUNTAINTOP MINING

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Science confirms that blowing up mountains harms mountains (*Grist*)

7 Jan 2010 12:04 PM
by David Roberts
Scientists would shout this from the mountaintops, but ...Photo: farukahmet via Creative CommonsLet's say you trundle a bunch of enormous industrial equipment into North America's oldest mountains (an intact temperate ecosystem boasting rich biodiversity, including a number of endangered species), clear cut the forests, blow millions of tons off the top of the mountains, dump the rubble into the pristine streams below, and carry out the coal you find on enormous trucks, at high speeds, on narrow roads, through some of America's oldest communities.

Think that would cause any ecological or human damage? Hmm ...

It might seem obvious, but as the media will tell you, "opinions on shape of earth differ," so it's helpful that a group of scientists has come along to assess the existing body of research on the subject.

And what does Science say? Yes, blowing up mountains causes environmental and health damage! Who woulda thunk it? In fact, the evidence is so clear that the scientists have taken the extraordinary further step of calling for an immediate moratorium on mountaintop removal mining permits.

The information is contained in a new paper being published today in the journal *Science*: "Mountaintop Mining Consequences." From the press release:

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the latest scientific findings and new data, a group of the nation's leading environmental scientists are calling on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to stay all new mountaintop mining permits. In the January 8 edition of the journal Science, they argue that peer-reviewed research unequivocally documents irreversible environmental impacts from this form of mining which also exposes local residents to a higher risk of serious health problems.

...

Co-author Dr. Emily Bernhardt, of Duke University, explains that “The chemicals released into streams from valley fills contain a variety of ions and trace metals which are toxic or debilitating for many organisms, which explains why biodiversity is reduced below valley fills.” The authors provide evidence that mine reclamation and mitigation practices have not prevented the contaminants from moving into downstream waters.

The authors also describe human health impacts associated with surface mining for coal in the Appalachian region, including elevated rates of mortality, lung cancer, and chronic heart, lung and kidney disease in coal producing communities.

“Over the last 30 years, there has been a global increase in surface mining, and it is now the dominant driver of land-use change in the Central Appalachian region,” says Dr. Keith Eshleman also of the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science. “We now know that surface mining has extraordinary consequences for both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Notwithstanding recent attempts to improve reclamation, the immense scale of mountaintop mining makes it unrealistic to think that true restoration or mitigation is possible with current techniques.”

Ironically, this comes on the heels of the Obama administration’s decision to approve a new MTR permit in West Virginia. Perhaps the EPA doesn’t believe that blowing up mountains harms mountains?

UPDATE: I’m listening to a conference call with some of the scientists who wrote the paper. It’s a real horror show.

The forests that get cleared store tons of carbon; the vegetation it’s replaced with doesn’t. So there’s a climate change connection (aside from the obvious coal connection).

Blowing all this stuff destroys the landscapes ability to absorb rainfall, which leads to increased flooding downstream. And those effects are expected to persist for *centuries*.

The industry claims it’s “replacing” headwater Appalachian streams, but you won’t be surprised to hear that hydrologists find that claim absurd. The hydrology ends up different and the streams end up polluted with trace metals (poisoning those downstream). These trace metals are also associated with decline in invertebrate biodiversity.

Permits are considered individually, but multiple permits granted in the same watershed leads to additive effects that persist for decades after abandonment.

Concentrations of selenium in the water bioaccumulate in the food chain and effects are magnified. The fish become poisonous.

And of course the human toll: poisoned water leads to more deformities in babies and worse academic outcomes. Air quality is degraded, leading to respiratory diseases. And on and on.

God this is depressing. I wonder how Don Blankenship feels about it.

UPDATE 2: Now in Q&A with the scientists. One says, “this is the most heavily peer-reviewed paper I’ve ever published—one review was 18 pages long.”

The scientists received no outside funding for this; they donated their time. One says the project was sparked by a request from NGOs.

They’re calling for a moratorium on permits until there can be a “rational hearing” on the science. Many of them were new to the issue when they started this; all of them seem kind of shocked by how horrific it is and by how little attention it’s gotten.

Asked about new permit just issued for Hobet 45 mine, Dr. Dennis Lemly says the water issue weren’t addressed. “This is just business as usual.”

One problem with permits: they only address valley fill area. But pollutants escape and many of their cumulative effects are felt downstream.

Asked: are there technological options available to deal with the water quality properly? Lemly: sure, it’s just a matter of cost. Dr. William Schlesinger adds: when you bury a stream, it’s gone. There’s no replicating it.

Dr. Emily Bernhardt: part of impetus of the paper was to provide regulators with a comprehensive overview. Met with a small group from U.S. EPA to present findings.

Bernhardt: all the data mining companies and the WV DEP collect information on surface water, but much of the pollution is found beneath the surface in water tables.

To me, the most amazing part of all this—and clearly the scientists are amazed as well—is the fact that *there’s never been a comprehensive assessment of MTR impacts before*. We’re blowing up mountains and we have no idea what the consequences are! The mind boggles. It’s like the whole country is just discovering Appalachia.

David Roberts is staff writer for *Grist*. You can follow his Twitter feed at twitter.com/drgrist.

PESTICIDES

better dying through chemistry

Pesticides loom large in animal die-offs (*Grist*)

7 Jan 2010 1:26 PM
by Tom Laskawy

Yale's Environment360 has a new must-read report by Sonia Shah linking pesticides to the high-profile die-offs among amphibians, bees, and bats. What makes this news timely isn't necessarily the toxicity of the pesticides per se, it's the indirect effects on these animals of chronic, low-dose exposure to chemicals:

In the past dozen years, no fewer than three never-before-seen diseases have decimated populations of amphibians, bees, and—most recently—bats. A growing body of evidence indicates that pesticide exposure may be playing an important role in the decline of the first two species, and scientists are investigating whether such exposures may be involved in the deaths of more than 1 million bats in the northeastern United States over the past several years.

... The recent spate of widespread die-offs began in amphibians. Scientists discovered the culprit—an aquatic fungus called *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*, of a class of fungi called "chytrids"—in 1998. Its devastation, says amphibian expert Kevin Zippel, is "unlike anything we've seen since the extinction of the dinosaurs." Over 1,800 species of amphibians currently face extinction.

It may be, as many experts believe, that the chytrid fungus is a novel pathogen, decimating species that have no armor against it, much as Europe's smallpox and measles decimated Native Americans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But "there is a really good plausible story of chemicals affecting the immune system and making animals more susceptible," as well, says San Francisco State University conservation biologist Carlos Davidson.

Shah goes on to explain a mechanism whereby pesticides applied to fields in California's Central Valley drift into the Sierra Nevada mountains "where they settle in the air, snow, and surface waters, and inside the tissues of amphibians." A scientist who studied the matter "found a strong correlation between upwind pesticide use ... and declining amphibian populations."

Meanwhile, bees and bats have suffered a similar fate—killed off by powerful pathogens that in theory could be novel but in practice seem to have taken advantage of animal populations immuno-compromised by pesticides.

One of the most interesting aspects of the piece was the description of an Italian scientist's unpublished research that suggests the "missing link" between neonicotinoids, a powerful pesticide already banned in Europe but still in use in the U.S., and bee colony collapse. It relates to the practices of using neonicotinoids-coated seeds planted by machines that kick up clouds of pesticide as they work:

... In as-yet-unpublished research, [University of Padua entomologist Vincenzo] Girolami has found concentrations of insecticide in clouds above seeding machines 1,000 times the dose lethal to bees. In the spring, when the seed machines are working, says

Girolami, “I think that 90 percent or more of deaths of bees is due to direct pesticide poisoning.”

Girolami has also found lethal levels of neonicotinoids in other, unexpected—and usually untested—places, such as the drops of liquid that treated crops secrete along their leaf margins, which bees and other insects drink.

But Shah concludes by observing that this accumulating evidence comes with challenges and caveats that, I would point out, industry ruthlessly exploits:

Proving, with statistical certainty, that low-level pesticide exposure makes living things more vulnerable to disease is notoriously difficult. There are too many different pesticides, lurking in too many complex, poorly understood habitats to build definitively damning indictments. The evidence is subtle, suggestive.

Subtle and suggestive though it may be, it’s extremely unlikely that these chemicals aren’t also acting on us. This news plus the data surrounding the consequences to human health of low-dose exposure to chemicals like atrazine, BPA and phthalates should have us in a panic and our government in a regulatory frenzy. Instead we get paralysis and promises of “further study.” As we wait for a chemical “smoking gun,” I wonder what animal population will die off next. Anyone care to wager?

- Comments

Tom is a media and technology consultant who thinks that wrecking the planet is a bad idea. He twitters and blogs here and at Beyond Green about food policy, alternative energy, climate science and politics as well as the multiple and various effects of living on a warming planet.

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