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AIR

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Report says Iowa air more polluted than thought (*Associated Press*)

Story also appeared: *KIMT Channel 3 News*

June 15, 2009
Last Update: 5:02 am
DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) - According to a published report, the air across Iowa is so polluted that the state is perilously close to violating new federal limits, but many Iowans have no way of knowing what chemicals they are breathing.

An investigation by the De Moines Register says that is because of a limited - and often inaccurate - system of monitoring pollution statewide.

Catharine Fitzsimmons, Iowa's top air-quality official, is defending the state's existing air-monitoring system, but she told the newspaper the state is under orders from the federal government to better monitor fine-particle and ozone pollution.

Fitzsimmons says the Iowa Department of Natural Resources will begin requiring major industries to do more thorough testing for fine particles after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency releases a long-awaited protocol.

Buy air beware (*Tulsa World*)

by: PHIL MULKINS World Staff Writer
Monday, June 15, 2009
6/15/2009 4:13:06 AM

This summer we'll spend 90 percent of our time indoors, where it's cool and where airborne pollutants are five times more concentrated than in outside air. We'll be tempted by TV ads for "air purifiers" but do they work and are they worth it?

Inside haze: Indoor pollutants include dust, cooking and tobacco smoke, pollen, animal dander, mite droppings, mold spore, bacteria and viruses, and vapors from stoves, vehicles, building materials, carpeting, glue, paint, cleaners and bug spray.

Portables: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Indoor Environment

Division says "portable air cleaners" might be beneficial when left to run continuously in the rooms we most occupy. But this assumes they have high enough CADR scores: "clean air delivery rates." This is determined by independent testing labs commissioned by the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers (see tulsaworld.com/CADR).

CADR: CADR is a measure of a portable air cleaner's delivery of contaminant-free air, expressed in cubic feet per minute. A cleaner with a "tobacco smoke CADR of 250" reduces smoke to the same level achieved by adding 250 cubic feet of clean air per minute. The CADR of a portable unit should be 2/3 of the area of the room it will occupy; a 15-by-15-foot room is 225 square feet, times 0.666 is a CADR of 150.

In-duct purifiers: There are also "in-duct particle and gaseous pollutant removers" that are attached to the home's central air conditioning system (see tulsaworld.com/EPAindoorair). These function only when the AC is running. Many particles are large enough that they don't remain airborne long and settle to the floor — out of reach of both portables and in-duct units, leaving vacuum cleaners as their only remedy.

Types: The association says some room air cleaners provide more filtering power than in-duct units, but this still depends on the tightness of the house, the outside temperature and the type of filtering technology being used: mechanical flat panel air filters, electrostatic, ultraviolet or mechanical HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filters.

Navistar Says EPA Favored SCR by Setting Guideline Illegally (*Transport Topics Online*)

By Eric Miller, Staff Reporter
This story appears in the June 15 print edition of Transport Topics.
Truck and engine manufacturer Navistar Inc. last week leveled new allegations against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, accusing the federal regulator of privately and illegally giving its competitors the green light to deploy a selective catalyst reduction emission control technology that could be implemented only with an “illegal relaxation” of EPA’s 2010 nitrogen oxide emission standard.

The new allegations were included in a 10-page document filed June 8 that opposed a request by several of Navistar’s competitors to be granted “friend of the court” status in Navistar’s petition for federal appeals court review, filed earlier this spring.

“Navistar filed the petition be-cause EPA has been diverted from its environmental mission and somehow talked into an environmentally hostile action,” the Navistar document said.

Navistar’s court brief said that EPA “illegally accommodated SCR manufacturers outside of the public eye and allowed them to deploy an emission control technology that can only be implemented with a de facto and illegal relaxation of the NOx emission standard.”

Navistar has asked the court to review several issues related to EPA’s February 2009 memorandum giving engine makers guidance on SCR, after the agency had said years earlier that it did not believe SCR would be feasible.

The Warrenville, Ill., corporation, manufacturer of International trucks, said EPA skipped an important regulatory step in allowing SCR technology after expressing serious doubts in 2001 that it would work.

Navistar is the only manufacturer planning to use exhaust gas recirculation to meet the 2010 EPA NOx emissions standard, first spelled out in EPA’s 2001 heavy-duty truck rule. All other truck and engine manufacturers plan to use SCR, which requires a urea-water solution called diesel exhaust fluid.

In its recent document, Navistar specifically alleged that an attorney for the Engine Manufacturers Association on behalf of the SCR manufacturers “convinced EPA that EPA had no choice but to reverse course and conclude that SCR was a viable technology for meeting the 0.20 g NOx standard.”

“In reality, the SCR manufacturers who led the effort to get EPA to approve SCR and allow them to pollute with impunity are predominantly foreign manufacturers who previous to the 2001 rulemaking were using SCR technology in foreign countries,” Navistar said.

The SCR engine makers convinced EPA to change its mind, Navistar said, “not because [SCR] was cleaner, but because it was cheaper to deploy, since they had already developed it and used it elsewhere.”

Navistar said one of the reasons the SCR manufacturers sought EPA’s help was because they had “an obvious marketing problem — the unattractive necessity of truck drivers being required to locate and fill up with urea every 6,000-8,000 miles.”

Navistar said EPA avoided the public rulemaking process because it could not demonstrate that SCR technology was viable.

“Navistar further submits that the continued infeasibility of SCR is the reason why the SCR manufacturers and EPA never triggered the public hearings and/or

afforded the due process mandated by Congress to reverse EPA's prior rulemaking," Navistar said.

An EPA spokeswoman declined comment on the new allegations.

Navistar, the largest U.S. manufacturer of medium-duty engines, entered the Class 8 engine market only recently. In March, the company introduced a 15-liter model, which combines the fuel-induction technology of its 11-liter and 13-liter models with the block and other basic components of a Caterpillar C15 power plant.

Late last year, Navistar said it planned to take a "leadership role" in calling for a delay of full implementation of the 2010 emission mandates.

But an EPA official said the agency had "absolutely no intention" of granting Navistar's request.

Rival manufacturers that plan to use SCR opposed Navistar's June 1 petition in which they asked to be granted friend-of-court status to back EPA. They warned of potential "significant consequences" if EPA is barred from certifying engines using SCR.

Included in the joint filing were independent engine manufacturer Cummins Inc.; Daimler Trucks North America and its engine subsidiary Detroit Diesel Corp.; Volvo Group America and Volvo subsidiary Mack Trucks. Paccar Inc., which makes Kenworth and Peterbilt trucks, did not participate.

The SCR makers did not comment by press time on Navistar's allegations and opposition granting them friend-of-court status.

"I can only say that Navistar must be in some traumatic difficulty, which is the only reason I can explain a tone like this in a court pleading," said Patrick Raher, a Washington attorney representing the SCR manufacturers.

In a June 9 conference call on company earnings, Daniel Ustian, Navistar's chief executive officer, did not shed any light on when Navistar's EGR engine would be able to meet EPA's 2010 emission cuts without the use of credits. He did say that emissions from Navistar's EGR engine are not yet down to 0.2 g/bhp hour of NOx.

"We'll be able to close that gap," Ustian said. "It's not all the way closed yet, and we have some plans how to do that . . . but we're making progress."

A Navistar spokesman said the company does not comment on pending court actions.

Staff Reporter Dan Leone contributed to this story.

June 15, 2009

How toxic is Iowa's air? It's hard to determine (*DesMoines Register*)

By CHASE DAVIS and PERRY BEEMAN
cdavis@dmreg.com
Clinton, Ia. - Residents of the gritty neighborhood of South Clinton have learned to tell which way the wind blows by the smell of chemicals drifting through their yards.

A gust whipping past the Archer Daniels Midland plant to the west carries a sweet aroma one resident compared to that of molasses. The acrid stench of gasoline has long meant a breeze from the east, where a weather-beaten tank leased to Equistar Chemicals, a subsidiary of petrochemical giant LyondellBasell, now sits empty.

Industry has surrounded this neighborhood for years, casting toxic fumes that some believe contribute to health problems, from lung irritation to cancer.

But as residents here have learned, proving that connection has been difficult. One reason: limited oversight and antiquated methods of measuring chemical releases in Iowa and nationwide.

Equistar "is saying, 'There's fumes, but not enough to hurt you,' " said William Foley, 28, a lifelong resident of the neighborhood who was diagnosed with kidney cancer in 2007. "They're not doing nothing down here to tell us what's going in or out."

http://data.desmoinesregister.com/pollution/pollutionpromo.css" />

http://data.desmoinesregister.com/pollution/iowa-pollution-map.php" style="text-decoration : underline ;">**Find pollution near you**

http://data.desmoinesregister.com/pollution/iowa-pollution-map.php">
http://cmsimg.desmoinesregister.com/apps/pbcsi.dll/link_image?ID=176653&maxw=180" width="180" border="0" />
http://data.desmoinesregister.com/pollution/iowa-pollution-map.php" style="text-decoration : underline ;">Use our statewide map to see who near you emits health-threatening chemicals

http://data.desmoinesregister.com/pollution/pollutionsig174x25.png" alt="Iowa's biggest polluters" />
Read the complete series

• http://desmoinesregister.com/article/20090615/NEWS/906150317/1001">How toxic is Iowa's air? It's hard to determine
• http://desmoinesregister.com/article/20090615/NEWS/90614010/1001">Companies fail to report accurately
• http://desmoinesregister.com/article/20090614/NEWS/906140352/1001">Iowa air pollutants push federal limits
• http://desmoinesregister.com/article/20090614/NEWS/906140347/1001">Health fears linked to pollution are justified, activists say
• http://desmoinesregister.com/article/20090614/NEWS/906140351/1001">Industries defend air-quality efforts
• http://desmoinesregister.com/article/20090614/NEWS/906140346/1001">Q&A: Problems with eyes, breathing might stem from toxic emissions
• http://desmoinesregister.com/article/20090614/NEWS/906140350/1001">Air pollution linked to range of health issues

A Des Moines Register review of state emissions data, compliance files from more than 100 Iowa facilities and federal monitoring rules shows neither regulators nor factories themselves can tell for certain which chemicals Iowans are breathing. Consider:

- Most facilities measure and report emissions with little oversight or verification from state or federal authorities. State regulators acknowledge the Iowa Department of Natural Resources essentially trusts companies to report emissions accurately.

- Rather than measuring their emissions, many companies still rely on oft-criticized federal equations, known as emissions factors, to estimate the amounts of many of the chemicals they put into the air. This continues even though federal authorities say the equations are inaccurate.

For example, more than 75 percent of the factors used to measure emissions of fine particles - a common pollutant that causes lung irritation - were considered so imprecise by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that former agency regulator Eric Schaeffer called them "almost guesswork."

- Records show facilities across the state have been cited for violations that can mask emissions: testing equipment at low capacity, failing to properly report excess emissions and leaving chemical monitors off-line for weeks at a time.

"The industry knows a lot of this stuff is bogus," said Schaeffer, EPA's former chief civil regulator and executive director of the Environmental Integrity Project,

a nonpartisan group in Washington, D.C., that advocates stronger enforcement of environmental laws.

Brian Hutchins, compliance chief of the Iowa DNR's Air Quality Bureau, said the government's regulatory measures must balance precision and cost.

Although facilities track their own emissions, DNR also operates a small network of more than 30 ambient air monitors in the state's industrial areas and population hubs. Still, the vast majority of the state is left uncovered, leaving only the facilities to measure emissions, even in areas with heavy polluters.

Forcing every factory, refinery and power plant to install expensive monitors at every emissions point would not be practical, Hutchins said. Nor would estimating every emission provide sufficient accuracy.

"It's a resource issue," he said. "We're doing what we can with what we have."

Emissions estimates have flaws, EPA agrees

State and federal regulators face a systemic problem in trying to improve Iowa's air quality: Decision-makers rely on self-reported emissions data to decide permit fees, set rules, write laws and discipline companies that do not comply.

Because of the methods companies use to estimate emissions, even honest corporations can inadvertently misreport the chemicals they vent into the air. Internal EPA auditors and the Government Accountability Office, Congress' investigative arm, have both raised concerns that estimates based on government equations are often inaccurate.

Likewise, companies that want to spin numbers in their favor also have ample opportunity to do so, Schaeffer said.

As recently as April, EPA officials acknowledged problems with common methods used to estimate emissions - particularly from chemical plants like the Equistar facility in Clinton - in a letter to the mayor of Houston, Texas, who has questioned their accuracy.

Without upgraded systems for measuring emissions, companies may continue to report incomplete and inconsistent data and even omit some emissions, the letter said.

A 2004 study by Schaeffer's Environmental Integrity Project reflected similar concerns. Using air measurements collected by Texas researchers, the study suggested chemical plants around the country were most likely emitting millions of pounds of pollutants that weren't accounted for in federal and state estimates.

Clinton County ranked among the top 25 nationwide emitters of several petrochemical compounds cited in the study, including benzene and 1,3-butadiene, which have been known to increase cancer risk.

Equistar spokesman Tom Nunheimer said the company measures its emissions based on the standards set by state and federal regulators, but acknowledged that "improvements by EPA to the process and accuracy of reporting would be beneficial for all stakeholders."

In Clinton, lack of data limits investigation

During the last few years, South Clinton residents have received a harsh lesson in the limitations of science.

Neighbors have fought Equistar and the city, complaining that the towering white vat east of their neighborhood at times vented chemicals that burned their eyes, stung their lungs and, some suspected, might cause cancer.

"I walked out the door one day and (the smell) just about knocked me to my knees," said Scott Reese, 53, who lives across the street from the tank. "I wouldn't have moved in here if I knew it was that bad."

Foley, the kidney cancer patient, has lived his entire life within a mile of the tank. He joined with other residents last year to request that the state study whether chemicals leaking from the tank posed a health risk.

The Iowa Department of Public Health sent a team last summer to evaluate the tank, which contained a substance known as pyrolysis gasoline that was composed of 20 to 40 percent benzene, according to the state's investigation.

Equistar provided two months of monitoring data to health investigators, but officials said the measurements were not enough to determine whether the tank posed a long-term risk.

"It was hard to be real conclusive with that work because we had such limited monitoring," said Stuart Schmitz, an environmental toxicologist and principal investigator for the Clinton study.

Investigators recommended that a long-term monitoring program be installed to measure benzene near the tank, but Schmitz said no monitor was ever installed. The company agreed to stop storing chemicals in the tank earlier this year.

Nunheimer said in a statement that the loading and storage of chemicals from the tank was done with "the best available emissions controls," including devices designed to limit vapors and destroy them when they are emitted.

Iowa DNR inspections rarely find problems

State regulators acknowledge they are in some ways at the mercy of companies - even those with a history of violations and inaccurate reporting - to provide accurate emissions data.

Fewer than 20 DNR inspectors specialize in inspecting the more than 1,600 facilities that emit air pollution, and many of those inspectors also investigate water quality issues and other problems.

"When it gets down to the record-keeping and monitoring ... (the companies) are doing that on their own," said Hutchins of the state Air Quality Bureau.

In 2007, Iowa and several other states filed a federal complaint against Equistar, alleging violations of the Clean Air Act and claiming that the company did not promptly report spills and leaks at its facilities in Texas and Illinois.

The company settled with federal authorities, agreeing to spend more than $125 million to implement tougher air and water quality standards and to undergo independent audits to ensure progress was being made.

One of the audits, conducted at the Clinton site last year, revealed several gaps in staff training and record-keeping. Among other things, auditors pointed out that staff had not been consistently trained about the consequences of releases of benzene and other chemicals at the plant.

Environmental groups worry that industries have little incentive to report emissions accurately and that they are held accountable by state and federal regulatory systems considered by some to be lax. The DNR resolves most disputes through agreements with offending companies, which typically pay fines of $10,000 or less if they break air quality rules.

Though most businesses with state air permits typically operate within their limits, records show that plants commonly experience breakdowns, operator errors and maintenance shutdowns that can result in excess pollution.

State inspectors are supposed to make unannounced visits every year to major permitted facilities, which also have to certify twice a year that they meet pollution permit requirements set by state and federal authorities. The facilities have to report any excess emissions during shutdowns or equipment breakdowns, for example.

Records show that most of the time, inspectors cite few if any problems. Occasionally, inspectors have trouble determining whether there are issues at all.

In January 2008, DNR inspector Trent Lambert showed up at Electrolux Home Products, the top emitter in Hamilton County. He wanted to check the four emissions points at the plant, which makes central vacuum units.

Yet, Lambert wrote in an inspection report: "There was significant confusion among facility employees as to what, exactly, the four emissions points were. In fact, it is unknown if they were ever correctly identified during the inspection."

An EPA inspection in October 2008 found the company failed to log the hours of operation of its oven, a permit violation.

Options to improve monitoring, air quality

Amy Broadmoore, a former air quality specialist with the Iowa Environmental Council, said improved monitoring by DNR and tighter federal requirements - making companies measure emissions rather than using estimates, for example - could help health experts better understand the effects of emissions in industrial areas such as South Clinton.

"We still have levels that are threatening health in some parts of the state that don't have monitors," she said.

But such testing is expensive. So, Hutchins said, the DNR has tried to get the most bang for its enforcement buck: Inspectors drop in on facilities at random, data quality experts try to verify suspicious emissions reports, and the state places air monitors in sensitive areas, he said.

"We're probably as good as any state when it comes to (monitoring)," he said. "But without continuous emissions monitors on every source, we'll always have some uncertainty in the estimates."

Additional Facts
How Iowa monitors air pollution

There are two primary methods of monitoring what types of chemicals are being emitted into Iowa's air, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency:

STATIONARY SOURCE MONITORING: Uses continuous monitoring, sampling and estimation techniques to measure the chemicals being emitted from a single point at a facility. Continuous monitoring takes continuous readings of certain chemicals coming out of an emissions point. It is among the most accurate and most expensive monitoring methods. Large power plants and other facilities are required to use it to measure sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide under federal acid rain reduction requirements.

Other emissions are measured by sampling and estimation. Facilities typically

take periodic readings from either their emissions points or the fuel they burn and use them to estimate emissions over a long period of time. Often, these estimates rely on emissions factors — equations approved by the EPA to gauge the quantity of chemical releases. Some factors, such as those used to estimate releases of particulate matter, have been criticized by watchdogs and even the EPA itself for being inaccurate.

AMBIENT MONITORING: Uses air sampling techniques to gather information about which chemicals are present in the atmosphere over a broad area. State and federal regulators operate networks of these monitors in order to test compliance with air-quality standards. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources operates a small network of more than 30 ambient monitors in the state's industrial and population hubs.

For more information, visit: cfpub.epa.gov/oarweb/mkb/Basic_Information.cfm.

June 15, 2009

Report: Trash-to-energy plants pose environmental hazard (*Burlington Free Press*)

By Sam Hemingway
Free Press Staff Writer
Eight national environmental groups are releasing a report today that, in Vermont, may mark the opening salvo in a debate over plans by an electric utility and a major trash hauler to someday build several trash-to-energy plants in the state.
The report, entitled "An Industry Blowing Smoke," disputes claims by proponents of such plants that the advanced system they use to convert solid waste to renewable energy is both good for the environment and step toward energy independence.

"They provide little to no benefit when compared to mass burn incinerators, while being even a riskier development," the report says in part. The report will be released this afternoon at the U.S. Conference of Mayors annual meeting in Providence, R.I.

"The core impacts of all types of incinerators remain the same: They are toxic to public health, harmful to the economy, environment and climate, and undermine recycling and waste reduction programs," the report also said.

An advance copy of the report was provided to the Free Press by Jessica Edgerly, an official with Toxic Action Center's office in Vermont. Edgerly said she

fears a trash-to-energy facility could expose Vermonters to dangerous amounts of dioxin, a known carcinogen.

"We don't need any incinerators in our state," she said.

Jim Bohlig, chief development officer for Casella Waste Systems, and David Hallquist, chief executive officer of Vermont Electric Cooperative, disagree -- vehemently.

Bohlig and Hallquist contend the small, trash-to-energy plants they hope will dot the state some time in the near future actually embody a green technology that is safe and ecologically sensible.

"Waste conversion technologies are a superior option to traditional solid waste management practices and these technologies are more than capable of meeting the most stringent air quality standards," Bohlig said.

Richard Valentinetti, the longtime director of the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Air Pollution Control Division, said he's intrigued by idea of an environmentally friendly waste-to-energy plant, but skeptical as well.

"It's still too early to size up something like this," Valentinetti said. "Things are happening so quick with the issue of biofuels. You may jump on something today as being a big deal and find out it does not mean an awful lot in a year." Bad reputation

If Casella and Vermont Electric Cooperative are to win support for their plans from state regulators and the public, they'll have to overcome bad memories of Vermont's most recent experience with trash incineration, the Vicon Recovery Systems plant in Rutland.

The $55 million waste-to-energy plant ran for just nine months in the late 1980s before its state air quality permit was pulled over health concerns about emission from its 165 foot-high stack.

John Casella, founder of Casella Waste Systems was for a time a part owner of Vicon. Bohlig said last week that Vicon got a bad rap, but what his firm is proposing now represents a whole new way of converting trash to energy.

Bohlig said the new "gasification" technology, unlike conventional combustion incinerators that burn trash and use the heat to make generate power, accomplishes the same end by heating the trash in an oxygen-deprived chamber to extremely high temperatures.

The heating process results in the production of "syngas" a synthesis gas that can be used to generate electricity. A small residue of dioxin -- well below federal Environmental Protection Agency emission limits -- is also produced.

The key, said Bohlig, is finding a way to separate any unwanted or hazardous solid waste out of the "waste stream" that fuels the plants. The company, which has been lauded for its commitment to recycling and green technology, is working on perfecting a front-end trash-sorting system at test sites in Boston and Buffalo.

Hallquist said if Casella can do that, their proposal to start building one-megawatt, trash-to-energy plants at sites around Vermont can work. He said the two men first pitched the plan to Valentinetti, representatives from environmental groups leaders and others during a meeting this spring.

"We hope that by that by the end of 2010 we will have fully vetted this and the issue of waste emissions," Hallquist said.

Edgerly, of Toxic Action Center, said she hopes that day never comes.

"We have two major concerns," she said. "The first is this will definitely create a new toxic waste problem for our state ... Second, once you build these facilities, you have to provide the fuel to feed them and that demand will directly compete with the composting and recycling industry."

She said there are other risks associated with the plants, should they malfunction. According to the report, a large German gasification incinerator had to be shut down in 2004 following an explosion, leaks in the heat chamber and the release of cyanide-contaminated wastewater from the facility.

There are about 140 gasification plants of various kinds worldwide, including 19 in the United States, according to the Gasification Technologies Council.

"Incinerating the nation's trash is a dirty, damaging and short-sighted non solution to the waste management problem," said Elizabeth Courtney of the Vermont Natural Resources Council, another environmental group opposed to the trash-to-energy concept.

"Recycling, composting, reducing the amount of waste we generate and consuming less in general is the only real long-term solution that helps protect the air we breathe, the water we drink and makes the most efficient use of the world's dwindling natural resources," Courtney said

Hallquist said he's not fazed by the report or the opposition of environmental groups to his and Bohlig's plans.

"I think a healthy public debate on this is a good thing," he said. "The last thing I want to do is bring a project to Vermont out of ignorance that's going to cause a problem."

Contact Sam Hemingway at 660-1850 or e-mail at shemingway@bfp.burlingtonfreepress.com. To get Free Press headlines delivered free to your e-mail, sign up at www.burlingtonfreepress.com/newsletters.

Report says Iowa air more polluted than thought (*Cedar Rapids News*)

Story also appeared: *KTTC News, Action 3 News, KWQC, KCAU, Chicago Tribune*

June 15, 2009 04:20 EDT
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Fitzsimmons says the Iowa Department of Natural Resources will begin requiring major industries to do more thorough testing for fine particles after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency releases a long-awaited protocol.

Economist shows the whole world how to go green (*Chicago Sun Times*)

June 15, 2009
BY TED PINCUS
Rich Sandor is a guy who lives in the future. He always has. In fact, he created some of the world's most advanced futures markets, and he's still at it. He says we're now on the verge of an environmental breakthrough.
Sandor, 67, is the city's homegrown math genius and economics Ph.D. whose irrepressible imagination conjured up the interest rate futures market and an array of other new sophisticated derivatives. As VP and chief economist of the Chicago Board of Trade in the 1970s and later its vice chairman and a key adviser to the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, London Financial Futures

Exchange, the United Nations, and Northwestern's Banking Research Center, he has been called "the father of financial futures."

But it has been a second calling of paternity that has propelled Sandor since the '90s as perhaps the world's leading force in creating tradable entitlements for the Earth's reduction of greenhouse gas emissions -- truly the "father of carbon trading." Today, his innovations are not only setting the stage for implementing cap-and-trade legislation now pending in Congress, but providing the foremost marketplace tailored for it: the Chicago Climate Exchange.

"This is by far the biggest challenge of my life," the ebullient, plain-spoken professor told me last week. "We're closer than we've ever been to realizing our goal in worldwide carbon emission control and attacking global warming. Very soon, carbon allowances will be the biggest non-financial derivative anywhere. Its trading volume could top $14 trillion per year."

All this may sound like science fiction to you if you've only paid casual attention to the cap-and-trade fervor that is sweeping Congress. But just ponder that soon the world will be comprised of companies and organizations that will have lots of difficulty complying with the vast new emission rules and penalties -- and those who have far more "carbon credits" than they need.

Under the new era to be ushered in this year by aggressive legislation led by Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) and ardently supported by the White House (and very likely to be passed this summer), companies will face strict Environmental Protection Agency standards designed to cut greenhouse gases to the 1990 level by 2020 and 80 percent below that level by 2050. Cap-and-trade is the mechanism that offers the economic incentive to make it all happen, giving the polluter time, and a temporary free pass, to prepare, and enabling the compliers to profit by selling the carbon allowance credits they don't need.

To help facilitate the movement, Sandor first won a grant in 2000 from the Joyce Foundation to enable him to lead research at Northwestern's Kellogg grad school to examine whether his cap-and-trade market concept was feasible.

In just the last year, Sandor has grown the Chicago Climate Exchange (CCX) to 470 members, including 17 percent of the Dow Jones industrials and a fifth of all CO2-emitting utilities. Its volume of contracts soared 205 percent in the last year to a record 707,655 contracts. Meanwhile, his Chicago Climate Futures Exchange had a 71 percent rise in trading volume (to a level now exceeding that of pork bellies, milk or lumber), and its new regional environmental markets are also surging, along with a new insurance exchange.

Aptly, the peripatetic professor loves to quote Emerson: "Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path, and leave a trail."

Ted Pincus is the former owner/CEO of the Financial Relations Board, and currently an adjunct professor of finance at DePaul University, an independent journalist, and managing partner of Stevens Gould Pincus LLC.

Posted on Mon, Jun. 15, 2009

Giving green paint new meaning (*Bradenton Herald*)

Story also appeared: *The Olympian, Miami Herald*

By ADRIANNE STONE
Mother Nature Network (mnn.com)
Adding paint color inside your home can provide vibrancy, enhance your mood and create a sense of personality in an otherwise drab room. It can also give you cancer.
Yes, those wonderful color palettes that have you swooning over the warm gold in your new living room, the pastel blues or pinks you're planning for your nursery, and the glossy peach tones in your bathroom contain something called volatile organic compounds - and they're deadly. Paints mainly release these chemicals into the air during application and drying, but fumes can continue to waft out for years. By then, you and your family may already have succumbed to asthma, cancer, dizziness, headaches, heart disease, and damage to the liver, kidneys and central nervous system, according to the EPA (www.epa.gov/iaq/voc.html).

Before you go running out to the local bioterrorism supply depot for a year's supply of gas masks, try your local paint emporium instead. New government rules have paint companies creating new lines that meet lower EPA standards, which require levels of less than 200 grams per liter of VOCs (as opposed to 750 grams per liter during the 1970s). Two nonprofit agencies - Greenguard Environmental Institute (www.greenguard.org) and Green Seal (www.greenseal.org) - provide certification for paint products that meet standards of 50 grams per liter or less. Many, in fact, contain less than 5 grams per liter (and are labeled "zero-VOC"), although they're pricier than those with slightly higher levels.

Initially, however, many of these "green" paints suffered from lack of durability in high-traffic areas and an inconsistency in drying patterns. But over the years, the process of creating paints that included such nontoxic synthetic binders as yogurt or donut powder has been perfected.

Natural paints, which are zero-VOC, are primarily categorized into clays, lime washes or milk-based paints. Clay-based paints mix minerals with water and provide the optimal look for adobe-style color tones. They absorb odor and require only two coats - like regular paints. On the downside, colors and textures

are limited and once it's applied, it can't be wiped down. So if there's a stain, it must be repainted. Lime wash mixes calcium-based minerals with water and is a bit less costly. It's also salt-, bacteria- and mildew-resistant, but can only be used on porous surfaces like brick, wood plaster and concrete, so drywall and painted surfaces aren't candidates. Furthermore, it requires several thin coats and, although it's environmentally safe, it's corrosive to eyes and skin, so goggles and gloves are required during application. Milk-based paint mixes the protein casein with clay and earth pigments to create a powder that's later mixed with water. The final mix must be done immediately before its use, however, to avoid clumping, and it's only available in a matte finish.

A quick gander at the Greenguard Environmental Institute's product guide (www.greenguard.org/Default.aspx?tabid=12) reveals 34 products that carry its Indoor Air Quality certification (and are also certified for children and schools), including eggshells, flats, glosses, primers and semi-glosses.

Many of these are available at hardware and home-renovation outlets. They include Benjamin Moore's Eco Spec line, Ecos Organic Paints, St. Astier's Lime Paints, Yolo Colorhouse and the super-pricey Anna Sova Luxury Organics (up to $69 per gallon). The Real Milk Paint Company's line is something of a hybrid, created from milk protein, lime, clay and earth pigments.

Even Home Depot now sells its own line, the Freshaire Choice Paint, which is VOC-free and has Greenguard certification. The 66-color line (which ranges from $35 to $38 per gallon) is described as "durable, goes on smooth, covers flawlessly and dries in minutes." Also, the packaging, samples and color cards are all made with recycled materials.

With these new eco-friendly paints, you can paint your rooms in the morning and sleep safely in them by evening. Your dreams will be of an unharmed environment and a healthy home. And they'll be in an assortment of rich, warm colors.

CLIMATE CHANGE / GLOBAL WARMING

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Democrats Struggling for Consensus on Climate Bills (*Washington Post*)

By Steven Mufson
Washington Post Staff Writer
Monday, June 15, 2009
Democratic allies remain at odds over provisions of a House climate bill and a Senate energy bill, even as congressional leaders and Obama administration officials are pressing to complete work on the legislation.

The latest rough patch came late Thursday afternoon when House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin C. Peterson (D-Minn.) met with the two chief sponsors of a climate bill to hash out differences in the office of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.). After more than an hour, they emerged without an agreement, gave reporters curt expressions of optimism and left without taking questions.

"There's no deal, but I'm optimistic," said Henry A. Waxman (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and co-sponsor of the bill. Peterson, who earlier that day said he would oppose the bill, said only that "we made good progress."

Peterson wants to make the bill more favorable to farmers and agricultural businesses. For example, he wants the Agriculture Department to have the authority to decide whether environmentally friendly actions by farmers would qualify for lucrative benefits under a system in which allowances to emit greenhouse gases would be bought and sold. Under the bill drafted by Waxman and Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), the Environmental Protection Agency would have that authority.

The Peterson problem is just one of many that stand between the Waxman-Markey bill and the ultimate adoption of a climate bill.

Democratic lawmakers also differ over provisions in an energy bill being drafted by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, which would open up the eastern Gulf of Mexico to oil and gas drilling and would water down an Obama campaign proposal setting minimum requirements for the use of renewable energy.

The differences over touchstone issues in the bill could jeopardize its chances of passage by the full Senate, where Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) is threatening to filibuster it over the provisions for drilling off the Florida coast. Major environmental organizations are also leaning toward opposing the bill. In addition, executives from companies in the wind turbine business are lobbying hard for stiffer renewable energy requirements, arguing that they would be better off with requirements that have already been enacted by 28 states.

"The current legislation does not create jobs and, more importantly, does not effect the sea change that President Obama sought," said Don Furman, president of the American Wind Energy Association and senior vice president of Iberdrola Renewables. Obama has said that he wants to double the amount of renewable energy use over three years and that he wanted to make renewables 25 percent of U.S. energy sources by 2025.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, is trying to craft a bill that would satisfy a majority on his

diverse committee, but Josh Dorner, a Sierra Club spokesman, said the bill had already "suffered death by a thousand cuts" and had "ended up in a disturbing place."

One key issue has been offshore drilling. On Tuesday, the committee approved an amendment by Sen. Byron L. Dorgan (D-N.D.) that would permit drilling in the eastern Gulf of Mexico 45 miles or more from the coast of Florida. It would allow drilling closer to shore in the Destin Dome, an area about 25 miles off the coast of the Florida panhandle where companies discovered natural gas years ago. (Though longstanding presidential and congressional restrictions on offshore drilling were lifted last year, the eastern Gulf of Mexico remains under special protection that was part of a 2006 energy bill.)

The muddled politics of offshore drilling cross party lines. Five of the committee's 13 Democrats voted against Dorgan's amendment, including Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), who is concerned about potential drilling off his home state, but Republicans supported it. Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.), a strong supporter of offshore drilling, also voted against Dorgan's amendment but only because she wanted some of the federal royalties diverted to state coffers. Her own earlier effort to direct a portion of royalties to the states failed, in part because the committee's Democratic majority won the backing of Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.), who believes that the federal Treasury needs the money from drilling in federal waters.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), meanwhile, won support for an amendment that would require the Interior Department to lease areas 180 days after environmental approvals are given for offshore drilling.

Democrats, environmental groups and wind industry executives are also sparring over a provision known as the renewable electricity standard, which would require electric utilities to use renewable energy sources for 15 percent of their power generation by 2021. But critics argue that the standard has been severely weakened by special exceptions. Utilities can use energy-efficiency measures to meet 4 percentage points of that amount. States could petition to get credit for more energy-efficiency measures and lower the renewable requirement further.

Because of an amendment by Sen. Evan Bayh (D-Ind.), whose state relies heavily on coal-fired power, utilities would also be able to pay a relatively modest fine for failing to comply. The money would go to individual states, which could return the money to the utilities or subsidize nuclear power or carbon capture and storage projects. The amendment passed with strong Republican support.

Murkowski, the ranking Republican on the committee, also inserted an amendment that would remove new nuclear power generation from the total energy used to calculate renewable minimums. Nuclear power is not considered renewable, but its supporters note that it does not emit greenhouse gases.

The draft measure would also ease restrictions on the use of crude from Canadian oil sands, which produce more greenhouse gases than ordinary petroleum and which could face obstacles under the renewable fuel standard adopted last year. The amendment passed by voice vote. The "committee correctly recognized the importance of Canadian oil to our nation's energy and economic security," said Jack Gerard, president of the American Petroleum Institute. He said oil companies would expand and upgrade refineries to handle the Canadian crude and would create thousands of new jobs.

EDITORIAL / OP-ED / COMMENTARY / LETTERS

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Is Obama caving in to coal? (*Los Angeles Times*)

The administration deserves credit for some minimal restrictions on mountaintop mining, but the president's hands-off approach to coal defeats his climate-change efforts.

June 15, 2009

Clear-cutting forests, then blowing the tops off of mountains and dumping the debris into stream beds is an environmentally catastrophic way of mining for coal. President Obama and the green activists he has appointed to run his interior-focused regulatory agencies surely know this. But their contortions over mountaintop mining would make a Cirque du Soleil performer wince.

The administration last week announced a number of new restrictions on mountaintop coal mining in the six Appalachian states where it occurs. They are minimal steps that, among other things, will make it harder for mining companies to escape environmental review when seeking permits to blow up mountains. For this, Obama merits polite applause.

That's in contrast to the much-deserved boos he received last month from environmentalists after his administration quietly sent a letter to coal industry loyalist Rep. Nick Rahall II (D-W.Va.) saying the Environmental Protection Agency wouldn't stand in the way of at least two dozen new mountaintop-removal projects. It was a dismaying move from an administration that in March had blocked several such projects on grounds that they needed further review -- yet some of the ones it greenlighted in May were as big and damaging as the ones it blocked two months earlier. What gives?

Obama is clearly intimidated by coal's powerful lobby. The industry is a major employer in West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee and other Appalachian states, where miners tend to vote for whichever party is friendliest to Big Coal. Yet there's also strong grass-roots opposition to strip mining in those states because of the effect it has on local communities; the technique poisons water supplies and pollutes the air with coal and rock dust. It also turns forests into moonscapes, ravages ecosystems and buries streams, which is good for neither wildlife nor the tourism industry.

The best approach to mountaintop mining would be to ban it completely. It's cheaper and less labor-intensive than underground mining, but not worth the environmental cost. At a minimum, Obama should address some other highly destructive rule changes imposed by the Bush administration -- a good place to start would be restoring a regulation that forbade mining within 100 feet of a stream, and disallowing the use of mine waste as "fill" material in waterways.

Obama can't sidestep this issue forever, especially because his hands-off approach to coal defeats the purpose of his efforts to fight climate change. Coal is a key culprit in global warming, and it makes no sense to encourage cheap coal while seeking to boost renewable energy.

June 15, 2009

How to fight global warming (*Philadelphia Daily News*)

SEVERE flooding, heat-related deaths, unhealthy air, loss of species and damage to agriculture and industry are some of the threats we face as a result of global warming. PennEnvironment reports that this state is a leading contributor to global warming in the U.S., responsible for 1 percent of total global emissions.

But there's hope. Congress can tackle **global warming** through clean-energy solutions and capping **global warming** pollution. It's called the American Clean Energy & Security Act.

Without serious action, Pennsylvania will continue to be affected by **global warming.** But with aggressive action, we can transform our country through the creation of jobs, investment of capital into our economy, freedom from foreign sources of energy as well as protection from increasing fuel costs. I urge citizens to support the Clean Energy & Security Act.

Laura Thornton

PennEnvironment Volunteer
St. Joseph's University

McCarthy's EPA Confirmation A Victory For Cleaner Air (*Hartford Courant)*

June 15, 2009
Gina McCarthy's confirmation earlier this month by the U.S. Senate for a top federal post was, so to speak, a breath of fresh air.

Ms. McCarthy established a reputation as a practical pro-environment administrator in Massachusetts and Connecticut. As Gov. M. Jodi Rell's commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection, she cleaned up an agency in which political influence held sway and was a regional leader in fighting greenhouse gas emissions.

Now she heads to Washington to become assistant administrator for air and radiation at the Environmental Protection Agency. She will help President Barack Obama's team of environmental advocates improve the nation's air quality and fight the dire threat of climate change.

During her confirmation hearing earlier this spring, she made a promise that was sweet music to the ears of those who lamented inaction by Bush administration officials. She would, she said, put science above politics.

Far-right climate-change skeptics fought her nomination and one, Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., delayed a vote on her confirmation for two weeks. Mr. Barrasso and friends think — contrary to mainstream scientific opinion — that climate change caused by human activity is a hoax. Following their do-nothing philosophy could have disastrous consequences.

Common sense prevailed. Ms. McCarthy got her vote. As Sen. Chris Dodd said, Ms. McCarthy's confirmation was a loss for Connecticut but "a win for the country."

ENERGY

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JUNE 15, 2009

Before Adding, Try Reducing (*Wall Street Journal*)

The U.S. government offers a lot of subsidies to expand renewable energy. Should it be doing more to subsidize conservation?
By SARI KRIEGER
The U.S. government is committing billions of dollars to support renewable energy such as wind- and solar-power plants. Some say it should use more of that financial clout to encourage less energy consumption in the first place. Advocates of conservation, including businesses that help homeowners and companies save energy, think there should be more subsidies and tax incentives for basics like insulation and window shading, and for newer, more costly products like light-emitting-diode lamps and building-automation systems. LEDs cost more but use less energy than incandescent bulbs. The new automation systems help buildings waste less energy on cooling, heating and lighting.
The Journal Report

See the complete **Environment** report.

Projects that improve efficiency pay for themselves quickly, the advocates say, and help people and businesses save money. Renewables, meanwhile, cost more money to achieve the same reductions in carbon-dioxide emissions.

By the Ton

A study by New York-based management consulting firm McKinsey & Co. earlier this year compared the cost of eliminating one ton of CO2 emissions using different means: Wind power cost about $38 per ton of CO2 saved; solar cost about $30. But replacing incandescent lights in a home with light-emitting diodes saved about $159 per ton of CO2, and using energy-efficient appliances saved about $108 per ton.

Some say it makes more sense to retrofit buildings for energy efficiency before adding renewable technologies like solar and geothermal power, because buildings account for about half of the CO2 emissions in the U.S. Efficiency improvements, these sources add, are often an easy, cheap fix in the struggle to reduce CO2 emissions.

“No matter how you cut this, it is always better to reduce, then produce,” says Matt Golden, founder of Sustainable Spaces Inc., a San Francisco-based home-retrofit company and president of Efficiency First, a home-retrofit trade group based in Washington, D.C., with about 300 members. But, Mr. Golden adds, “it turns out the incentives are absolutely backwards. The things that save the most energy and create the most jobs get the least incentives.”

The recently passed stimulus package provided about $40 billion of funding in the form of grants, tax credits and research money for renewable technologies. But it had only about $20 billion for energy-efficiency measures, such as better insulation and highly efficient windows in homes, and automation systems in

commercial spaces. These figures are based on government and industry-group calculations.

In the tax-credit portion of the bill, renewable technologies get a credit of 30%, with no cap on the amount, while the credit for energy-efficiency technologies is capped at $1,500, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. A hypothetical $40,000 solar-panel installation on a home would be eligible for a $12,000 tax credit. But a $20,000 energy-efficiency job on a home would be eligible for only a $1,500 credit.

Even the solar industry recommends starting with energy-efficiency steps. “It’s silly to invest in solar energy if the extra power is blowing out the window,” says Monique Hanis, a spokeswoman for the Solar Energy Industries Association in Washington, D.C. “We believe they work together.”

So why do lawmakers provide more incentives for renewable energy? Natalie Mims, an energy consultant at the Rocky Mountain Institute, Snowmass, Colo., says it’s because renewables tend to cost more and take longer to pay for themselves than most efficiency measures. “Renewable energy has historically received higher subsidies than energy efficiency, particularly in research and development,” Ms. Mims says.

But new efficiency technologies, while cost-effective, have yet to be embraced by a wider public; some are unfamiliar and may have a high initial cost, like LEDs, while others are older technologies that aren’t as interesting compared to solar panels, such as insulation. Subsidies, Ms. Mims says, could help these technologies spread.

Some energy-efficiency advocates say renewables get more government subsidies because wind farms and solar power are more glamorous and easier to understand than, say, building-automation systems and LEDs, and because the renewable industries are larger and more organized.

Clark Wilson, chief executive of Green Builders Inc., an Austin, Texas, home builder and retrofit company, adds, “The solar-panel industry has a great lobby and a unified story, while the efficiency industry spans several heretofore competing trades and [has] no one champion of the group.”

House Bill

One efficiency advocate in Congress is Rep. Peter Welch, a Democrat from Vermont. Mr. Welch supports renewables but says efficiency is his primary focus because it’s more cost-effective and creates more jobs. He introduced a bill in March that would create $10 billion of incentives over four years for homeowners and businesses that adopt efficiency measures. His bill has since been rolled into the energy bill now working its way through Congress.

“When you look at the stimulus tax rebates, the amount that goes to insulation is the least, but it’s the most effective,” Rep. Welch says. “Your first dollar spent you’d want to spend on what would give you the most return. I have been astonished about how neglected efficiency is when it’s the low-hanging fruit.”

Incentives in Rep. Welch’s bill are performance-based, offering homeowners rebates of $1,000 to $3,000 for achieving a 10% to 20% increase in efficiency, with $150 more for every additional percentage point of energy savings achieved. Businesses could qualify for 15 cents per square foot for the first 20% to 30% increase in efficiency, and as much as $2.50 per square foot for energy reductions of more than 50%.

The bill has 30 co-sponsors and is supported by environmental groups like the New York-based National Resources Defense Council.

“We should have the policy of efficiency first,” says Mr. Welch.

--Ms. Krieger is a reporter for Dow Jones Clean Technology Insight in New York. She can be reached at sari.krieger@dowjones.com*.*

Produce, or Reduce?

This year’s stimulus package provided roughly double the funding for renewable technologies as for energy efficiency—about $40 billion vs. $20 billion—even though conservation may be more cost-efficient. Below is a rough breakdown. Some programs include renewables and conservation, but they are grouped based on where government and industry officials say the bulk of their funding will go.

For Renewables

Tax credits	$20 billion
Loan guarantees	$6 billion
Transmission infrastructure for renewable energy	$5.5 billion
Carbon capture and sequestration	$3.4 billion
Research	$2.5 billion
Batteries	$2.3 billion

For Energy Efficiency

State Energy Program (provides grants to states)	$3.1 billion
Weatherization Assistance Program	$5 billion
Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants Program	$3.2 billion
Smart-grid projects	$4.5 billion
Energy-efficient federal buildings	$4.5 billion
Energy Star Appliance Rebate Program	$300 million
Advanced Research Projects Energy Program	$400 million
Grants for retrofits to affordable housing	$250 million

Sources: Alliance to Save Energy; speaker.gov; WSJ reporting

Posted on Mon, Jun. 15, 2009

Louisville buildings compete to save energy (*Associated Press*)
Story also appeared: *Lexington Herald-Leader*

LOUISVILLE — More than 200 Louisville buildings are shedding kilowatts. Businesses and government agencies are taking part in Louisville's first "Kilowatt Crackdown," an 18-month energy-efficiency challenge that began last year and ends in December with the goal of saving money and helping the environment.

The efforts are being tracked using tools from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"If you can reduce energy consumption in your building, you are going to save in the operating expenses of your company," said Chris Cieminski, general manager of the 35-story Aegon Center and chairman of the Louisville Energy Alliance, the non-profit group overseeing the Kilowatt Crackdown. "Long term, if we reduce our overall consumption, it means LG&E (Louisville Gas & Electric) doesn't have to build another power plant."

Louisville joins Portland, Ore., and Seattle — two cities noted for their environmental initiatives — in offering the challenge through the EPA's Energy Star program.

This all began two years ago, when Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson approached business leaders about the initiative and put them in touch with the EPA. Participants in the Kilowatt Crackdown signed up last year and have agreed to track their energy use and document their conservation measures.

Winners will be announced in 2010. Cieminski said the alliance intends to offer another challenge that year.

The Aegon Center — which already has been certified as an Energy Star building, meaning it meets certain federal standards for energy efficiency — has recently installed several new types of energy-efficient lighting, including some in its elevators.

Several participants in the challenge say they are taking it seriously.

"We are absolutely going to give it our best," said David Noltemeyer, a facilities and real-estate manager for nearby Humana, which entered three of its Louisville buildings in the challenge.

As one of its initiatives, Humana upgraded the elevators in its Waterside Building so that the motors shut down when not in a high-traffic period, Noltemeyer said.

Kroger entered 10 of its grocery stores in the competition. Kroger initiatives include energy audits in which crews check the stores at night to ensure that cooler doors are closed, computer screens are off and other equipment is operating efficiently.

Kroger also is trying out energy-sipping LED lighting in some refrigerated and frozen-food cases.

Jefferson County Public Schools entered dozens of buildings, the most of any organization, in an effort to save on its $18 million annual utility bill.

Several facilities are getting new heating and air conditioning, and all will be subject to improved energy management, said Mike Mulheirn, director of facilities for the district.

"If we could reduce our energy by 3 percent, that would save us half a million bucks," he said.

FUEL

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JUNE 15, 2009

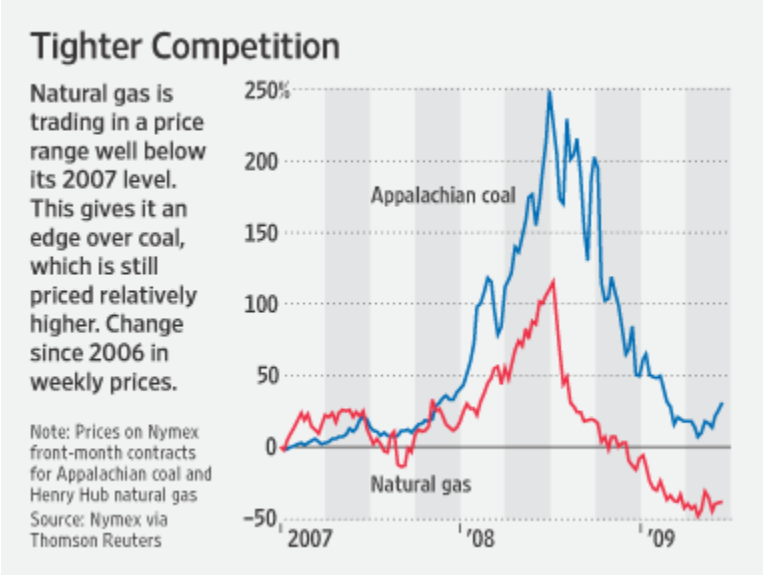
Lower Natural-Gas Price Leaves Coal Out in Cold (*Wall Street Journal*)

By REBECCA SMITH and BEN CASSELMAN
A precipitous drop in the price of natural gas means lower bills for some electricity consumers but spells trouble for coal producers, long the dominant source of fuel for the electric-power industry.
Abundant new supplies of natural gas, combined with reduced demand for electricity, have sent prices tumbling to less than $4 per million British thermal units from more than $13 last July. That drop could prompt power companies to invest billions of dollars in natural-gas fired plants.
"Nobody was talking about $3 gas a year ago," said James Daly, director of gas and energy supply for Nstar, the utility formerly known as Boston Edison. Nstar is cutting residential electricity rates 27% on July 1 and anticipates a similar reduction in January, if gas prices remain low. Gas is the primary generating fuel in New England.
Coal has produced the biggest share of U.S. electricity for more than a century. Above, a train car filled with coal heads to Paducah, Ky., in May.
For more than a century, the U.S. has relied on coal to produce the biggest share of its electricity. Coal now accounts for about half of the nation's electricity, compared with about 21% from natural gas.
But natural-gas plants can be built more quickly and inexpensively than coal plants, and they release about half as much carbon dioxide as coal to produce similar amounts of electricity. That could be a big advantage if Congress passes a climate-change bill that would cap such carbon emissions.

This isn't the first time the power industry has embraced natural gas. In the late 1990s, as states deregulated their electricity markets, a new breed of so-called merchant generators built scores of gas-fired plants, encouraged by rosy supply forecasts and easy borrowing.

Enthusiasm waned by 2002, when such merchant generators as Calpine Corp., Mirant Corp. and NRG Energy Inc., landed in bankruptcy court. Gas prices also began to rise sharply around 2007, following the run-up in oil.

New natural-gas discoveries, however, in Texas, Louisiana, Pennsylvania and elsewhere, have created a gas glut that analysts expect to linger. Energy consulting firm Wood Mackenzie predicts gas prices won't recover until 2015.



Power companies are beginning to ratchet back investments in coal-generated plants to take advantage of low gas prices and hedge against costly climate-change legislation.

"We're pulling back the coal throttle," said Ted Craver, chief executive of Edison International, Rosemead, Calif., which owns several coal-fired plants that sell power on the open market. With sales poor, his company took units out of service early for seasonal repairs this year, hoping sales will pick up this summer.

In parts of the U.S. where there are daily electricity auctions, gas generators are chipping away at coal market share with lower prices. Coal-to-gas switching has created incremental gas demand of three billion cubic feet a day, and "further switching potential is still large, in our view," said a research report released June 1 by Merrill Lynch & Co.

"Fuel switching aggravates a situation that's already bad for coal," said Shneur Gershuni, analyst at UBS Investment Research.

Coal consumption by the U.S. power industry is expected to drop by 2.3% this year, according to the Department of Energy's Energy Information Administration, and coal production by mining companies is expected to drop 5% to 10%.

"There basically is no spot market for coal right now," adds Jim Thompson, managing editor of the Coal and Energy Price Report in Knoxville, Tenn., a coal-industry newsletter. "Coal companies are living off their utility contracts."

Utilities mostly obtain coal through multiyear contracts. As a result, even though spot coal prices have fallen, prices paid by utilities are expected to rise 2% this year to an average of $2.11 per million BTUs. Next year, the EIA expects coal prices to dip slightly to an average of $1.91 per million BTUs.

Those numbers suggest coal is still about half the price of natural gas. But the numbers can deceive. Gas-fired power plants convert fuel into electricity more efficiently than coal units, and it is cheaper to move natural gas than coal. As a result, gas can still have an advantage over coal even if the commodity cost is higher.

Write to Rebecca Smith at rebecca.smith@wsj.com and Ben Casselman at ben.casselman@wsj.com

Biodiesel tanks (*Helena Independent Record*)

By JOHN MILLER - Associated Press - 06/14/09
NEW PLYMOUTH — The railroad siding at Blue Sky Biodiesel hasn't seen an oil train for six months. A dozen 25,000 gallon storage silos in this 104-year-old Payette River farming town sit empty.
Owner Rob Black began his $4 million facility in 2005 amid high hopes: Prices for the soybean and canola oil to produce fuel for diesel vehicles were low and diesel prices were rising. French fry plants nearby promised a steady supply of used grease.

Meanwhile, everyone from country singer Willie Nelson, with a biodiesel-burning tour bus, to rock festival Lollapalooza, which ran its amps off biodiesel, was singing the fuel's praises.

Despite the green hype, a complicated brew of factors have forced Black and at least a third of America's biodiesel refiners to cease operation. Commodity prices skyrocketed, diesel fell. The credit crisis turned off the cash spigot. Concerns arose about biofuels' impact on South American forests. And the European Union has played a role, too, enacting tariffs in March aimed at stopping U.S. subsidized biofuel exports.

Black, whose plant was delayed four months in 2006 by an explosion that killed his 25-year-old son, Blaise, is unflinching when asked what went wrong.

"Don't you mean, 'Why was I so stupid?' " he told The Associated Press.

The numbers say it all: Last week, the price of West Coast canola-based biodiesel was about $3.42 per gallon, before taxes; conventional diesel went for under $2. Even with a $1 per gallon federal credit for blenders, biodiesel costs 20 percent more.

Charley Jones, president of Idaho's 40-outlet Stinker Stores service station chain that contracted with Blue Sky, had hoped to be blending up to 3 million gallons of biodiesel annually into the conventional diesel he sells. He does just a fraction of that — with biodiesel from the Midwest.

"I originally counted on Blue Sky being successful," Jones said. "But the economics went south on them."

Misery loves company.

In Hoquiam, Wash., Imperium Renewables Inc. has shuttered its $88 million plant. Two Tennessee biodiesel plants that opened in 2007 laid off most of their workers in May.

And a Delaware plant that, like many others, was erected with federal and state subsidies as the promise of biodiesel was still promising, was sold at auction in January for $1.35 million — well shy of the $10 million invested.

Of some 176 U.S. biodiesel refiners, more than 60 have been shuttered, the National Biodiesel Board estimates.

Production this year could fall to half 2008 levels of 690 million gallons.

"There's a volatility in commodity markets, and with the current economic crisis, there's a severe crunch on lack of capital," said Michael Frohlich, spokesman for the Jefferson City, Mo.-based industry group. "And the biggest problem we have right now is the holding pattern with the renewable fuels standard."

In 2007, Congress required 1 billion gallons of biodiesel be used as part of the nation's transportation fuels mix by 2012, raising optimism it was to be a hot commodity. But lawmakers also required biofuels achieve specific greenhouse gas reductions, compared to the gasoline and diesel being displaced.

In May, the Environmental Protection Agency dropped a bombshell: Biodiesel made from virgin soybean oil wouldn't qualify toward reaching the 2012 renewable fuels standard of 1 billion gallons, according to a draft rule. That's because as the United States refines more soybean oil into biodiesel, EPA regulators predict countries like Brazil will plow up their own carbon-reducing forests and grasslands to produce soy for food or fuel to take up the slack.

Not surprisingly, biodiesel companies argue such calculations are based on flawed science.

“It’s ironic we have policy makers talking about how we should be clean and green, but yet, when it comes to supporting those ideals economically, there’s a complete failure,” said Imperium Chief Executive Officer John Plaza, who has laid off 90 of his 120 workers in western Washington.

At least 12 U.S. senators, including Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, and Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, argue the EPA provisions will “stifle the investment that is so essential to our national renewable fuels strategy.”

Environmental groups are wary, saying politicians wading into science makes for bad policy — even if the goal is to boost domestic fuel production and cut dependence on foreign oil.

“There’s a scientific integrity principle,” said Jeremy Martin, a senior scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists in Washington, D.C. “The answer is not just to jump in and do a legislative override, just because it’s inconvenient.”

After packed EPA hearings this week in Washington, D.C., it remains unclear just when a final EPA rule will be released — and what it will look like. The agency’s top brass now is discussing alternatives, including reducing greenhouse gas reduction requirements and letting producers mix soy oil with used animal fats to meet the standard.

Not all U.S. refiners are singing the biodiesel blues.

In Salem, Ore., SeQuential Pacific Biodiesel, which can produce 5.8 million gallons annually, is back at two-thirds capacity after closing earlier this year for lack of buyers. Manager Tyson Keever said a raft of local advantages, including state income tax credits and a biodiesel fuel mandate eventually due to rise to 5 percent, are crucial.

And Keever relies on famously green Portland for both his raw materials — restaurant grease — and for his market: In addition to 35 pumps where SeQuential biodiesel blends are sold, Portland has had its own 5 percent biodiesel mandate since 2007. Celebrities are on SeQuential’s side, too: Singer Jack Johnson is an investor.

“If we were trading straight off the commodity pricing, it’s a very difficult environment to be in today,” Keever said.

Other states may talk bullish on biodiesel, but action is scarce.

For instance, Washington state set a goal of having biofuels make up at least 20 percent of its fuel use in state vehicles and ferries, but such fuel accounts for only about a tenth of that. Its law has no penalties for noncompliance.

And back in Idaho, where Blue Sky owner Rob Black is trying to unload his idled refinery at a loss, the 2009 Legislature made it even tougher for the biodiesel industry by repealing a 25-cent-per-gallon tax exemption — to raise more money for road repairs.

“It looked like a deal we could handle,” Black remembers. “Then, we had the explosion, and by the time we got it rebuilt, in the fall of 2006, it was about a break-even proposition. Then, feedstocks tripled, and diesel didn’t go high enough. That’s pretty much what cooked us.”

Taking A Stand For Biofuels (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*)

U.S. Rep. Collin Peterson is fighting against his party's cap-and-trade emissions proposal, in defense of Minnesota's ethanol industry.
By ERIC ROPER, eric.roper@sta rtribune.com
Last update: June 14, 2009 - 9:27 PM
WASHINGTON - Collin Peterson, Minnesota's outspoken farm country congressman, is kicking up dust in Congress this month with his threats to obstruct a key climate change bill over concerns that the government is undermining farmers -- particularly in the ethanol industry.
While the issue is new, however, Peterson says the challenge is familiar. "We have a big problem in agriculture not being able to explain to city people what we're doing," said the Detroit Lakes Democrat.

Peterson, chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, has taken Democratic leadership to task over a sweeping piece of legislation that would create a "cap and trade" system for regulating carbon emissions -- converting the right to release emissions into a limited commodity to be distributed by the government and traded among companies.

He threatened to kill the bill last month after the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed a rule that would increase ethanol's calculated carbon footprint, a change he insists could be fatal for the ethanol industry. Since then he has become one of the most vocal opponents of the legislation, emphasizing that agriculture would be harmed by inevitably higher fuel costs.

"Merging the climate change goals and the energy independence goals are potentially working at cross-purposes if we do this wrong," said Peterson, who represents the fourth-largest ethanol-producing state in the country.

It is far from the first time the 10-term veteran has bucked his party in Congress. A member of the Blue Dog faction of fiscally conservative Democrats, he was one of only 11 Democrats to vote against President Obama's stimulus spending package in January.

As a moderate Democrat from a Republican-leaning district, Peterson has clout with Democratic leaders. His concerns have caught the ear of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who has been meeting with Peterson and others to try to strike a deal and advance the legislation, a cornerstone of her agenda.

MINING

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EPA to rebuild tainted Navajo homes (*Associated Press*)

Story also appeared: *Washington Times*, *Boston Globe*

June 15, 2009 Monday
NEWS; National; Pg. 2
FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. - The federal government plans to spend as much as $3 million a year to demolish and rebuild structures in the Navajo Nation that are contaminated with uranium.

Cold War-era mining of the radioactive substance has left a legacy of disease and death across the 27,000-square-mile Navajo reservation, which spans Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah.

The **Environmental Protection Agency** and its Navajo counterpart are focusing on homes, sheds, and other buildings within a half-mile to a mile from a significant mine or waste pile. They plan to assess 500 structures over five years and rebuild those that are too badly contaminated.

Between the 1940s and the '80s, millions of tons of uranium ore were mined on the reservation and many Navajos built their homes with chunks of uranium ore and mill tailings. They were unaware of the dangers.

The residents of contaminated homes will not be charged for the rebuilding.

June 15, 2009

Obama mountaintop vow too little too late, says NRDC (*Business Green*)

Lobby groups argue new promise to tighten water pollution oversight will not do enough to limit impact of "abhorrent" mining projects
Danny Bradbury, BusinessGreen 15 Jun 2009
Green groups have criticised a set of measures announced by the White House last week in an attempt to limit the environmental damage caused by mountaintop removal mining.

The Natural Resource Defense Council said that a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between a number of govermnment agencies last week does not go far enough to address the environmental risks associated with controversial mountaintop removal mining.

The White House's Council on Environment Quality announced that the Army Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of the Interior, had committed to implementing a range of environmental protection measures by the end of the year, including providing better guidance on how they evaluate the environmental effects of projects, and improving oversight on water pollution permits in areas affected by mining.

However, NRDC senior scientist Dr. Allen Hershkowitz warned that " unspecified references to strengthening permit reviews provides no assurance that the administration will end this abhorrent practice soon".

He added that the Army Corps of Engineers is still able to permit the huge stream fills associated with some mountaintop removal projects.

However, in the the MoU the Corps promised to issue a proposal within 30 days to modify Nationwide Permit 21, making it impossible to use the permit to grant the discharge of fill materials into streams.

Hershkowitz added that the administration should instead signal its support for legislation designed to effectively ban mountaintop removal mining. "There are bi-partisan bills in Congress right now - the Clean Water Protection Act in the House and the Appalachia Restoration Act in the Senate - that would also help end mountaintop removal, and we look to the administration to push for legislation that ends mountaintop removal," he said.

The issue is particularly contentious at present, given the recent EPA approval of 42 controversial mountaintop removal projects in Appalachia.

Mountaintop removal involves exploding mountain tops to reveal previously inaccessible coal seams. Environmentalists decry the activity because of its tendency to spread pollutants across mountain environments, contaminating drinking water and other resources. They had hoped that the Obama

administration would move to limit the practice, but were left disappointed by the decision to approve the new projects.

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www.businessgreen.com/2244113

RECYCLING

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Published on June 15th, 2009

360: Recycling Plastic Bags (*Earth 911*)

by Amanda Wills
Many of us have plastic bags stuffed into the doors of our cars, under the kitchen sink or in various nooks in the garage. With about 380 billion plastic bags, sacks and wraps used each year, recycling is paramount.
In 2007, more than 830 million pounds of plastic bags and film were recycled nationwide, up 27 percent from 2005. Plastic bags can be made into dozens of new and useful products as well. So, let's get down the basics about plastics bags and figure out how to save this material from the landfill.

According to the EPA, in 2007, the U.S. generated almost 14 million tons of plastics in the municipal solid waste stream as containers and packaging, almost 7 million tons as non-durable goods, and about 10 million tons as durable goods.
Photo: Howstuffworks.com

Top 10 Reasons to Recycle Plastic Bags

1. It's Right Around the Corner
According to the American Plastics Council (APC), more than 1,800 U.S. businesses handle or reclaim post-consumer plastics.

2. It's Worth a Thousand Words
Plastic bags *photodegrade*, meaning they slowly break down into smaller and smaller bits that can contaminate soils and waterways.

3. We Need a Boost
According to the EPA, only about 12 percent of bags and film were recycled in 2007.

4. Everyone Wants It
There is a high demand for this material, and in most areas, demand exceeds the

available supply because many consumers are not aware that collection programs are available at stores.

5. It's Easier Than You Think
It takes 91 percent less energy to recycle a pound of plastic than it takes to recycle a pound of paper.

6. You Can Save a Trip
For every seven trucks needed to deliver paper bags, only one truck is needed for the same number of plastic bags.

7. Just Let It Burn
Plastics can help trash burn more efficiently in energy-recovery facilities, creating energy that can be used to make electricity in some communities.

8. It's Going Coast to Coast
Small plastic bags made up about 9 percent of the debris found along various U.S. coasts in a five-year study.

9. Save Some Gas
When one ton of plastic bags is reused or recycled, the energy equivalent of 11 barrels of oil is saved.

10. It's So Trashy
According to the EPA, the amount of plastics generation in municipal waste stream has increased from less than 1 percent in 1960 to 12.1 percent in 2007.

Tips on Recycling

Due to their light weight, most curbside programs do not accept plastic bags. They can easily get stuck inside machinery when recycled as well. However, most grocery stores throughout the U.S. now offer plastic bag recycling. However, the trick is actually remembering to take those excess bags with you next time you go to the store. Here are a couple of reminding tips:

- Hang a cloth bag in your kitchen or garage where you put excess plastic bags. It will be easy to notice once you leave the house.
- When filling out your grocery list, make sure to add "recycle plastic bags."
- Don't forget about the other light weight plastics! Plastic film, dry cleaning bags, newspaper bags and plastic wrap from products can be recycled at your grocery store as well.
- Toss your leftover plastic bags in your reusable shopping bags. You'll remember both on your next trip to the store.

  Many grocers and retailers now offer drop-off programs that allow shoppers to return their used bags to be recycled. In most stores, bag

collection areas are located at the front entrance or near checkout areas. Photo: Independent.co.uk

The Recycling Process

A plastic bag is a thermoplastic, meaning it is capable of being repeatedly softened by heat and hardened by cooling.

1. First, the plastic is melted down.

2. The softened plastic is then pushed through an extruder. To visualize this, reflect back on the days when you owned a Play-Doh kitchen set and you made delicious plates of bright green spaghetti. Squeezing Play-Doh through the little machine to make it into noodles is similar to extruding.

3. An extruder die appropriately shapes the plastic before it is cut with a knife.

4. The end result could be a large piece of composite lumber or thousands of little pellets, which can be used to make other plastic products.

What's Next?

Although many consumers reuse plastic bags in their homes for daily tasks such as doggy duty or taking out the trash in the bathroom, there are still other products that plastic bags can actually become once recycled.

Plastic bags can be made into second generation products including durable building and construction products, door and window frames, exterior moldings, low-maintenance fencing and decks. Plastic bags can also be reprocessed into post-consumer resin used in the production of new bags, pallets, containers, crates and pipes.

Though the discussion of plastic bag bans has increased (the U.N. has even suggested a global ban), San Francisco is currently the only U.S. city to outlaw them.

TOXICS

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Cushioning for kids could be toxic (*Beaver County Times*)

Beaver,PA

By Larissa Theodore, Times Staff
WHAT IT IS

Crumb rubber, also referred to as ground rubber and tire crumb, is a product derived from granulated, recycled car and truck tires. The tiny particles are sized based on a screen the rubber passes through when processed. For example, tire crumb slightly less than 1/10th of an inch has passed through a 10 mesh screen, or a screen with 10 holes per inch. Various size reduction techniques can be used to achieve a wide range of particle sizes.
HOW IT'S USED
Ground cover under playground equipment: Because it gives, it has the ability to absorb the energy from falling children and objects.
Running track material: It increases a track's resiliency and decreases stress on runners' legs.
Sports and playing fields: As a soil additive, it increases the resiliency of the field, thereby decreasing injuries, improves drainage, and enables better grass root structure.

EPA moves to streamline chemical risk assessments (*Business Green)*

New proposals designed to speed up process for assessing risks from new chemicals

Danny Bradbury, BusinessGreen 15 Jun 2009

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is trying to reintroduce some of the transparency lost during the Bush era by changing the way the health effects of chemicals are reviewed.

A Congressional subcommittee is currently reviewing the new process, which was proposed by EPA administrator Lisa Jackson in a memo released last month, and aims to streamline the way potentially hazardous chemicals are reviewed for the EPA's Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) database.

Jackson said that previous changes to the process implemented in the final year of the Bush administration has "reduced the transparency, timeliness, and scientific integrity of the IRIS process".

The Bush administration gave the Office of Management and Budget the ability to review draft assessments from the IRIS process. It then put in place revisions to the rules in 2008, which gave other agencies the chance to review the assessments.

NGO OMB Watch said the changes led to further delays to the process, resulting in many chemicals not being included on the database.

"In part, because of the length of the process, EPA has made little progress in finishing new assessments," said OMB Watch. "From 2004 to 2008, the agency completed assessments for only 16 substances."

A Government Accountability Office report also found significant problems in the process as revised by the Bush administration.

The new process gives the EPA complete control over the outcome of the review and should ensure that risk assessments are completed quicker, providing information on how potentially hazardous chemicals should be managed and regulated.

However, the latest changes have still drawn criticism from some chemicals experts. Although it mandates that all comments are now made public, the process nevertheless gives the White House a chance to comment on draft assessments, which has led to concerns over political influence on the scientific assessment process.

This is not the first time the OMB has been accused of applying political muscle to influence scientific decisions. Just over a year ago, it was also linked to rewrites of proposed adjustments to EPA ozone standards.

Permalink: http://www.businessgreen.com/2244109

www.businessgreen.com/2244109

WATER

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Mistake by EPA changes funding of sewer project to I-71 in West Salem (*Wooster Daily Record*)

Wooster,OH
By BRYAN SCHAAF
and BOBBY WARREN
Staff Writers

WEST SALEM -- One month after gathering input from residents on a proposed sewer extension from the village to Interstate 71, a paperwork snafu has left the $1.2 million project dead in the water.

Village administrator Rick Witucki said he was notified of a mistake by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency that reduced the total funding of the project from 75 percent to just 50 percent, making the extension impossible to afford for the cash-strapped village of 1,500 people.

"Apparently when the EPA was divvying up the funds, they screwed up on 12 or so cities," Witucki said. "The biggest was with the city of Geneva. They're now getting 90 percent of funding, and they changed ours to 50 percent. I don't think that's doable now."

The change means instead of having to come up with $300,000, which would have been paid through a 20-year, zero-interest loan, the village would have to come up with $600,000 for the project.

The project was the topic of discussion earlier Wednesday when it was part of an intergovernmental review process by the Wayne County Planning Commission.

Karl Kanehl, a member of the commission, recused himself from the planning side of the process and presented the proposed project to the group in his role as zoning inspector for West Salem.

Extending the sewer line would promote economic development, add jobs, reduce unemployment and increase revenue to local government entities, Kanehl said.

Two Congress Township trustees questioned whether the project should move forward.

Trustee Dave Knight said township residents approved zoning for agricultural and residential use and that there were just "too many ifs and not enough information."

Trustee Bill Cletzer submitted his comments stating the project should be delayed until questions are answered. He stated a steering committee spent one-and-a-half years on a comprehensive plan, but there had been no discussion with the township about the project.

Commissioner Ann Obrecht said the steering committee's work was a public process and to ignore all of that input because stimulus money is available does not do justice to those who participated in the plan.

Commissioner Jim Carmichael said it seemed the process was not moving in the right order and recommended village and township officials meet about the project.

Commission member Joel Montgomery said getting buy-in from the township was important. Though Montgomery supported the project and wanted to make sure the commission's actions did not affect any timeline the village might have, he said he could not foresee the Environment Protection Agency approving it without the two entities reaching an agreement.

The commission ended up tabling the matter.

Reporter Bryan Schaaf can be reached at 330-287-1645 or bschaaf@the-daily-record.com.

Fluent in effluent: West Side wastewater plant has first birthday (*Northwest Arkansas Times*)

Monday, June 15, 2009

A snapping turtle, hungry for minnows in Goose Creek, swam against a current of 5,000 gallons per minute streaming from Fayetteville's West Side Wastewater Treatment Plant on Wednesday afternoon.

The water was warm and had a slight golden tinge. Its quality is slightly better for the environment than drinking water from the tap because it has no chlorine and minerals are intact, said Billy Ammons, regional business manager for OMI, which operates the city's two plants.

"This would probably have a little salt taste, feel a little different," Ammons said of the water.

Known in the business as effluent, the water is tested quarterly via biomonitoring. Fathead minnows and water fleas are introduced to make sure they survive and do not develop reproductive problems.

About 7 million gallons of effluent each day are released into the 6- to 8-foot-wide Goose Creek, which flows about 2 miles downstream before joining the Farmington Branch of the Illinois River, below Double Springs and Goose Creek roads.

After a full year of operation, the plant has met all standards under its National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit and had zero odor complaints since first releasing effluent into the creek on June 1, 2008.

Fayetteville is permitted to annually discharge 1.2 million pounds of pollutants, such as ammonia and phosphorus. During the past year, only 224,000 pounds were discharged, Ammons said.

"In general, we remove about 99 percent of what comes in," Ammons said.

During a presentation last month to the Fayetteville City Council, Ammons' boss Rob Kuta said having no permit violations during the first year of a startup was "unprecedented in my 24 year career" and the equivalent of "winning the Super Bowl."

Fayetteville is the only city in Northwest Arkansas contracting out its wastewater operations. It's just as cost effective as operating oneself and has many advantages, David Jurgens, utility director, said.

"When there's a problem, rather than us scrambling to find an expert, they deal with their scientists," Jurgens said. "A really qualified operator can also detect problems by odor, appearance, color, a difference in foam. They can also deal with the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality for us."

The 40-acre property on Broyles Road is unexpectedly quiet; millions of gallons of sewage flow through a series of pipes, tanks and buildings. Processing takes about 24 hours.

The $61 million plant screens the sewage, separating solids to be smashed and transported to a landfill. The liquid is pumped into four aeration basins, where friendly bacteria are cultivated and ammonia and phosphorus are removed. The product flows to four clarifiers where the bacteria settle out. Next is disinfection with ultraviolet light and aeration - adding air so the water is healthy for the aquatic environment.

The city's other wastewater treatment plant, the Paul R. Noland Wastewater Treatment Facility, treats about half the amount wastewater, but has a tougher job because it serves more industry. Organically, the Noland plant handles up to 60 percent of the load, Ammons said.

Noland also uses chemical scrubbers that require bleach - unlike the West Side plant, which disinfects using ultraviolet light, a more environmentally friendly method, Jurgens said.

This could change should the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency pursue a reduction on phosphorus discharge to less than 0.1 milligrams of phosphorus per liter for plants discharging into the Illinois River basin. That limit is down from 1.0 milligrams and would be effective June 2012.

Only eight water-treatment plants in the U.S. can currently meet that proposed level, Jurgens has said.

The West Side plant generally has been discharging 0.43 to 0.5 milligrams without using chemicals, although sometimes it has reached as low as 0.3 milligrams.

Further use of chemicals could still fail to lower phosphorus discharge to 0.1,

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