U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
Blog Round-up

Prepared by the Office of Public Affairs

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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With the internet, blogs, Twitter, forums - people are talking about EPA 24/7
Here's a sampling of what was said on Feb. 17, 2010:

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

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Regulation & Science

iPhone app pitches climate change science against scepticism
Posted by: eolinter 7:20 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/8XiJVN
(Note: For every argument tossed forward by climate change skeptics, there's a body of scientific research that clarifies the issue. Thanks to an Australian solar physicist by the name of John Cook, you can access those skeptics' arguments, and the science-based counter-arguments, on your iPhone.)

FoxNews: EPA Endangerment Finding Inflames Climate Change Debate
Posted by: DontReElectNE1 7:15 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/d6Kulo

Department of Defense, world's top energy consumer, factors climate change into its long-term strategies
Posted by: juliepiotrowski 7:05 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/9R8VFw

AP: Business groups challenge EPA on greenhouse gases
Posted by: NewsChannel10 7:00 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/bHklCO

TX state climatologist: There is no scientific basis to roll back EPA finding that GHGs endanger the public
Posted by: KHayhoe 6:17 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/bIAuuE
(Note: "anthropogenic increases of greenhouse gas concentrations clearly present a danger to the public welfare, and I agree with the EPA's findings in that sense")

Texas, Virginia challenge EPA greenhouse gas finding (The Christian Science Monitor)
Posted by: Bill987232 6:15 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/9ArhhS

Texas Environmentalists Criticize Perry's Challenge of EPA Endangerment Finding
Posted by: KUHFNews 6:05 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/cd9UFR

Recovery Act Anniversary

THURSDAY: EPA Administrator Jackson Visits Columbus, Ohio for Recovery Act Announcement / Marking one-year milestone
Posted by: EPOnline 7:35 pm Full post: http://ow.ly/16Bun3

One Year Later, EPA-Funded Recovery Act Projects Yielding Cleaner Air, Water and Land Across New York State; EPA As...
Posted by: EPOnline 7:30 pm Full post: http://ow.ly/16Bun3

One year later, EPA-funded recovery act projects yielding cleaner air, water and land
Posted by: www.pollutiononline.com 7:05 pm Full post: http://www.pollutiononline.com/article.mvc/One-Year-Later-EPA-Funded-Recovery-Act-0001?VNETCOOKIE=NO

EPA, State of Colorado recognize Recovery Act benefits ...: Many of these projects feature "green" measures...
Posted by: TWT_SAVE_ENERGY 7:00 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/bZY58s

EPA-funded Brownfields Projects Announced in Newark on 1-Year Anniversary of Recovery Act -- environmental justice
Posted by: ISEadler 6:15 pm Full post:

ROUND-UP OF MAJOR BLOGS

CLIMATE CHANGE

Texas state Climatologist disputes his own state's climate-denier perition (*Wonk Room*)

Texas's own state climatologist can find no scientific basis in his state's effort to roll back the Environmental Protection Agency's finding that greenhouse gases endanger the public. Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott (R-TX) filed paperwork to challenge the EPA endangerment finding yesterday, asserting that the conclusions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the United States Global Change Research Program (USGCRP), and the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) cannot be trusted because of "serious misconduct" by a "cadre of activist scientists colluding and scheming." In an email interview with ThinkProgress'

Wonk Room, Texas State Climatologist John Nielsen-Gammon dismissed the Climategate conspiracy theories:

Do I think that the EPA based its assessment on sound science? I think, by basing its assessments on the IPCC, USGCRP, and NAS reports, it was basing its assessments on the best available science. I have the expertise to independently evaluate the quality of these reports, and **on the whole they constitute in my opinion the most comprehensive, balanced assessments of climate change science presently available**.

Although Dr. Nielsen-Gammon expressed concerns with the potential cost of Clean Air Act greenhouse gas emissions controls, and believes that climate science has "a tendency to focus on the risks and bad consequences of global warming" instead of potential benefits, he — and the entire Texas A&M Department of Atmospheric Sciences — finds that "anthropogenic increases of greenhouse gas concentrations clearly present a danger to the public welfare."

ENERGY

Cube Tube Turns Your Cubicle Into Solar Powered Kingdom. Maybe (*Treehugger*)

by Jaymi Heimbuch, San Francisco, California on 02.18.10
Science & Technology
Here's something you don't see in every (or any) office building - a cubicle outlined in solar panels. It's a way to convert all that wasted indoor lighting into energy to power...um...your desk lamp? For half an hour? Well at least one or two small devices on your desk, though not your computer which is the biggest energy sucker you have in your cubicle. It's intended to help office buildings lower their electricity bill since workers can plug their gadgets straight into the base of their cube, rather than into the wall. But...can it?

Red Ferret points us to this creation by Solar Road Technologies, which is looking to have the CubeTube on the market in 2011. The creators state: "The device simply clips to cubicle walls, or can be placed on desktops or windowsills. CubeTube's patented cylindrical shape allows light harvesting in all directions, not just overhead. Unlike other solar energy products, CubeTube will not be affected by weather changes because it works completely off of indoor lighting."

Solar cells on rounded surfaces like this tend to be less efficient than flat solar cells, since a smaller surface area is pointed directly at the light source, plus indoor light harvesting is usually less efficient than direct sunlight. So all in all, the tubes lining a cubicle will only generate a minimal amount of energy. The idea of placing these along window sills is smarter.

If the device(s) plugged into the CubeTube need more juice than ambient lighting can provide, the CubeTube switches to its backup battery, where energy generated by the solar cells is stored. And if that isn't enough, then it will switch over to AC power from the grid.

It would probably take a significant number of these tubes lining every cubicle corner to gather up enough to run the office printer. Though, we can't be sure about that - the makers don't specify how much electricity output this would be capable of. It might end up being a brilliant solution when it comes on the market next year, but we're kinda guessing it will take a very long time before an office manager saw a return on investment with these.

Still - it's a clever idea, and we love the creative thinking for how to get offices less dependent on grid energy. It's a good intention though not the best invention. And we just hope this wouldn't encourage offices to leave the lights on at night...

TOXICS

TOXIC EMANATIONS FROM ALABAMA'S ASH HOLE

Complaint cites health threats at Alabama dump taking TVA's spilled coal ash (*Grist.org*)

An Alabama creekkeeper has filed a complaint with the Environmental Protection Agency citing health threats including runoff containing alarmingly high arsenic levels at a bankrupt landfill that's taking hundreds of millions of gallons of coal ash spilled from the Tennessee Valley Authority's Kingston coal plant.

The Arrowhead Landfill—owned by Perry County Associates and managed by Phill-Con Services and Phillips & Jordan—is near Uniontown, Ala., a community in rural Perry County where 88 percent of residents are African-American and almost half live in poverty. The landfill sits only 100 feet from some people's front porches.

"Why is Perry County being treated like this?" asks Hurricane Creekkeeper John Wathen, who wants the ash shipments stopped until the problems are fixed. "Are the people in Perry County any less valuable than the people of Kingston, Tenn.?"

Last July, the EPA approved TVA's plan to ship by train to the Perry County dump more than half of the 1 billion gallons of coal ash that spilled from TVA's Kingston plant in eastern Tennessee's Roane County in December 2008. EPA assured the public that the Alabama landfill "complies with all technical requirements specified by federal and state regulations," but what Wathen has documented calls that into question.

After months of investigating local residents' complaints of unusual runoff and sickening smells and getting no help from state or EPA regional regulators, Wathen sent a complaint to EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson yesterday documenting serious environmental health threats at the 976-acre facility:

*** Dangerously high arsenic levels have been found in what's described as "stinking gray/tannish waste" being pumped nightly pumping from the landfill.**

Tests of the leachate collected by Wathen from one of the on-site pumps indicated the presence of arsenic—a contaminant characteristic of coal ash and a known carcinogen—at 0.840mg/L. That's more than 80 times the U.S. safe drinking water standard of 0.01 mg/L and far higher than what's considered safe for aquatic life. Wathen took his findings to the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, but ADEM reportedly declined to investigate after the landfill manager denied the pumping claims. "No tests, no samples, no interviews of employees or nearby residents [affected]," says Wathen's complaint, "just a simple denial by the manager was good enough to refute hundreds of photos, certified lab results, [anecdotal] stories from the community, or first hand eye witness account[s] by me."

*** The arsenic-tainted waste runs in the landfill's roadside ditches at levels that have exceeded safe drinking water limits.** "While people do not drink from the ditch, it leads through private land where farm animals do drink from the surface water," Wathen says. The ditches also drain into local streams. ADEM has attributed the material in the ditches to the chalky local soils used to build the haul road, but Wathen says the agency has failed to produce any evidence to back up that claim. Perry County is not among the areas of the U.S. where dramatically elevated levels of arsenic have been found to occur naturally in groundwater due to high levels in soils.

*** An excessive amount of wet material is being dumped into the landfill, threatening the protective liner.** The mixture of spilled coal ash and and other hazardous waste being dumped into the landfill is now piled about 60 feet high in places, with the wet conditions adding to the crushing weight. "The liquid levels actually stand well above the top of the liner and the high water levels seem to be consistent regardless of rain," Wathen writes. "It is my understanding the landfill allows a maximum permissible liquid level of only 18 inches above the bottom of the liner. There looks to be at least 20 feet of water standing in existing cells." Compounding the problem, the company that had been taking waste liquids from the landfill announced earlier this month that it would no longer accept the shipments, which it had planned to treat before sending through the Mobile public sewer system. Wathen had counted as many as 20 tanker trucks—each carrying as much as 9,000 gallons of leachate—leaving the site each day**.**

*** Contaminated coal ash is falling from overloaded, uncovered trucks and spilling along the road.** "This means that the haul road itself is now contaminated and all storm water leaving the haul road should be treated as potentially toxic," writes Walthen. Untreated runoff from the road now flows into nearby Tayloe Creek—and when the rain subsides and the weather dries out, the concern is that all the mud will turn into airborne dust.

*** When the train cars hauling coal ash to the landfill are washed off, the runoff is allowed to flow into Tayloe Creek's drainage basin.** While the landfill operator erected silt fences at the site recently, they were standing under several feet of sludge during Wathen's two inspections earlier this month. And at the point where the site drains into the creek, the operator has constructed a dam of riprap, essentially using the

waterway as a treatment facility—something that Wathen notes is prohibited by both EPA and Army Corps of Engineers regulations.

"According to the agreement with EPA and TVA, no ash can be shipped to any landfill that does not meet compliance standards," Wathen writes in the complaint. "We therefore respectfully request that EPA order a complete stopping of disaster ash to Perry County until this landfill is in complete compliance as certified by EPA national headquarters. EPA Region 4 and ADEM have failed us."

In the meantime, Florida attorney David Ludder has announced that he plans to sue the landfill's operators on behalf of 155 local residents over the foul smell coming from the facility. He had previously announced plans to sue the facility's owners, but they filed for bankruptcy last month—a move that prevents any new lawsuits from being filed against them until the bankruptcy is settled.

(To see photos of the Arrowhead Landfill, including aerial shots provided courtesy of SouthWings, click here. This story originally appeared at Facing South.)

- Comments

Sue Sturgis is the editorial director of Facing South, the online magazine of the nonprofit Institute for Southern Studies in Durham, N.C.

WATER

Legislation passed for clean-up of uranium tailings site near Tuba City (*Treehugger*)

Joshua Lavar Butler
Office of the Speaker
Tuesday, February 16, 2010
WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. - The Resources Committee of the 21st Navajo Nation Council met Feb. 12 and passed Legislation No. 0065-10 pertaining to the clean-up of the uranium tailings site located northeast of Tuba City.

The legislation, sponsored by Council Delegate George Arthur (T'iistoh Sikaad/San Juan/Nenanezad), passed the committee with a 6-1 vote. With the bill's passage, $4.5 million will be utilized to clean the uranium site near Tuba City, which is located north of the former uranium processing facility known as Rare Metals Uranium. The site is also known as the Highway 160 site because of its northerly location off of U.S. Highway 160.

The legislation also includes extending the cooperative agreement dates between the Navajo Uranium Mill Trailing Remedial Action Program and the U.S. Department of Energy to carry out the ground water remedial action pursuant to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ground water protection standards.

Council Delegate Arthur said the Highway 160 site tailings were left by the former uranium processing facility.

"In past years, there have been attempts to stabilize the site but it has failed various times," Arthur explained. "The Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency has been very instrumental in identifying the stabilization and clean-up initiatives, as well as lobbying for this site."

The funding will be controlled by the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency (NNEPA), the agency responsible for the investigation of the contaminated area since 2003.

Cassandra Bloedel, environmental program supervisor with NNEPA, explained, "In 2003, information was received by local families who knew of the contaminated site. They were witnesses to those uranium activities in the late 1950s and in the early 1960s."

"In February 2004, the site was reported to the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, Emergency Response in which they came to the site for an investigation in May of 2004," Bloedel said. "The site was shown to have radioactive waste located within the area. The U.S. EPA did not find the mill balls that would later be discovered by Navajo EPA contractor Dr. William Walker."

"In January of 2006, Navajo EPA hired contractor Dr. William Walker to further investigate the site. Dr. Walker worked from 2006 into 2007 and identified further mill related waste, and finding of the mill balls used in uranium processing, and showed the site had high areas of radioactivity," added Bloedel.

"In April 2007, the late Arlene Luther, then-department manager with NNEPA, was the one who approached the U.S. Department of Energy to have them respond to the Highway 160 Site since they were the later operators of the former Rare Metals Uranium Mill. The company did their own investigation of the site and determined that the site did possess waste from the former Rare Metals Site, and they were the ones who fenced in approximately 7.6-acres to protect humans and livestock that graze within this area," Bloedel said.

"To further ensure stability of the site, a palliative cover that hardens like a crust was placed on top to prevent any contamination from leaving the site since there are very high winds such as 50 miles per hour that frequent the area," Bloedel added.

"In March 2009, U. S. President Barack Obama passed the Omnibus Appropriation Bill for $5 million for the Highway 160 Site," Bloedel added. "Since there was no direct mechanism to pass the funds to Navajo EPA, they were redirected to the Navajo UMTRA Program since an existing MOA was in place."

Bloedel also mentioned the site is secure with fencing and is monitored on a monthly basis by the Navajo EPA with El Paso Natural Gas contractors.

Department Manager Madeline Roanhorse of the Office of Abandoned Mines, an agent to Arthur's legislation, also informed the committee the $4.5 million will be utilized to hire technical staff at the site for project management on environmental clearance, site characterization and developing a design for remedial action and monitoring.

"The passing of this legislation will help to restore land for the Tuba City community such as providing more grazing pastures and opportunities for other community development projects," said Roanhorse.

The Resources Committee passed the legislation and it will now be considered by the Intergovernmental Relations Committee for it final adoption.

Most places try to keep coal ash out of the water

Using Coal Ash to Melt Ice (*Grist.org*)

17 Feb 2010 2:47 PM
by Bruce Nilles
Co-written by Lyndsay Moseley, Associate Washington Representative *for the Sierra Club Beyond Coal Campaign.*

On Thursday, the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will start using coal ash to melt the thick ice on the Platte River in Omaha, Nebraska, to prevent ice jams and severe flooding. From the article:

"The hope is that the dark ash will absorb the sun's energy and help 'rot' the ice so it breaks up into smaller chunks and washes downstream, Berndt said."

Coal ash contains heavy metals like lead, mercury, arsenic and more – all of which are linked to increased rates of cancer, learning disabilities and reproductive problems. The metals can be ingested through the dust or when dissolved in water.

This strikes us as a strange and dangerous move – one community is going to add coal ash to their water while many others are worried about how it will affect their water supplies.

For example, the Tennessee Valley Authority is working around the clock to get tons of coal ash out of the Emory and Clinch rivers to protect public health and the environment in Tennessee.

Also, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is drafting a rule to mandate safe coal ash disposal practices. Yet for some reason officials in Nebraska think it's is a good idea to take 86 tons of bottom ash from a coal plant and dump it onto the river ice via cropduster.

We are looking into this action by the Army Corps and the state to see if it violates any environmental laws designed to protect the rivers and drinking water sources.

For now, please urge EPA to move forward with federal safeguards that protect our waterways from improper coal ash disposal. And if you're in or near Omaha, Nebraska, write a letter to the editor today!

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