U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
Blog Round-up

Prepared by the Office of Public Affairs

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February 17, 2010

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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With the internet, blogs, Twitter, forums - people are talking about EPA 24/7
Here's a sampling of what was said on Feb. 16, 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.

Climate Change Alliance

Three Major Firms Pull Out of Climate Change Alliance
Posted by: foxnewspolitics 6:25 pm Full post: http://fxn.ws/br7QIm

Frustrated, ConocoPhillips, Caterpillar and BP America Leave Climate Coalition
Posted by: Edmunds 6:15 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/aZyQxs
(Note: Company officials said legislation pending in Congress does not do enough to promote expanded natural gas consumption as a hedge against climate change. Moreover, the legislation puts the transportation sector, including oil and gas producers, at a disadvantage compared with coal)

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Regulation

Texas governor sues EPA; we cite him for endangering Texans
Posted by: citizenangela 6:30 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/ccu6uj

GOP lawmaker accused of plagiarizing Wash Times' anti-climate change rant
Posted by: washdcnews 6:32 pm Full post: http://dlvr.it/21kr

National Association of Manufacturers & other biz groups petition to challenge EPA endangerment finding.
Posted by: NAM_Shopfloor 6:00 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/b00lRX
(NOTE: NAM and other business groups today filed a petition in federal appeals court challenging EPA's decision to regulate greenhouse gas emissions (GHG))

TX Takes Legal Action Against Federal Government Over EPA CO2 Mandates
Posted by: TexGov 5:53 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/ax5bJH
(Note: From Governor's office)

Richmond Times-Dispatch: Atty Gen Cuccinelli asks EPA to reconsider global warming statement
Posted by: WarmImpact 5:59 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/9fQ6X1

Nuclear Power

Obama ups nuclear investment for climate fight
Posted by: reuters 6:30 pm Full post: http://link.reuters.com/fag89h

Olympics and GHG

Going for the Green at Winter Olympics: Real Sustainability Or Just Greenwashing??
Posted by: Ecocise 6:40 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/9V93fa

Making Olympic history! Just announced the Government of Canada's commitment to offset federal GHG emissions for the Vancouver Games.
Posted by: jimprentice 6:10 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/9fQ6X1
(Note: Minister of the Environment and Parks Canada Agency)

Stimulus Project Funding

Fresno News Now: $517M of stimulus for Calif EPA projects to date.
Posted by: fresnonewsnow 6:05 pm Full post: http://dlvr.it/21fR
(Note: The federal government is spending about $517 million in stimulus dollars to shore up the economy and create green jobs in Calif.)

Open Government Initiative

RT @EPAgov We're looking for your help to make EPA more transparent, find ways to work better w/you
Posted by: toyohara 6:16 pm Full post: http://go.usa.gov/lUu
(Note: Toyohara is an engineer in Japan)

ROUND-UP OF MAJOR BLOGS

AIR

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Texas Takes Aim at EPA Regulating CO2 as Pollutant - Files Petition in Court of Appeals (*TreeHugger*)

by Matthew McDermott, New York, NY on 02.17.10

Here's another group opposed to the EPA calling CO2 a danger to human health and potentially regulating it under the Clean Air Act. The US Chamber of Commerce has come out against it (big surprise), and now Reuters reports that the state of Texas has tossed its ten gallon carbon emitting hat into the ring:

The state has filed a petition to review the so-called 'endangerment finding' with the US Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit because, to paraphrase Texas governor Rick Perry, Texas' big polluters are going to have to change their ways, that is going to cost them, and potentially lose jobs.

Governor Perry called the EPA finding "misguided" and that it "paints a big target" on the backs of Texas energy producers.

Putting a Target on the Back of Polluters is a Good Thing
The Governor isn't wrong in thinking this. Setting a price on carbon, regulating it through the Clean Air Act or otherwise, does paint a target on the back of polluters. Indeed, that is the very intent of it. It is designed to make polluters clean up their act and transform the way the United States generates its electricity and power supply more broadly. Texas and other states heavily dependent on fossil fuel and chemical manufacturing will certainly have to adapt. This is a good thing in the long term, even if it means growing pains in the short term.

Environmental Issues Gunning For Us All
Not to mention that the Governor doesn't seem to realize that the nexus of environmental problems we're now facing--climate change, declining fossil fuels, biodiversity losses, overconsumption of natural resources--are painting a target on all our backs, not just the companies and people in his state. Continuing to push off addressing these issues, as the EPA endangerment finding is a solid first step in doing, only will make it worse.

Also filing petitions on Tuesday challenging the EPA were the National Association of Manufacturers, the American Petroleum Institute, and the National Petrochemical and Refiners Association.

CLIMATE CHANGE/GLOBAL WARMING

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Last Best Chance for Climate Legislation Before 2013? (*The Huffington Post*)

Richard L. Revesz and Michael A. Livermore
Posted: February 17, 2010 11:34 AM

The climate change bill that passed the House last summer looks likely to die in the Senate. So, with the political machinery in Washington grinding to a halt, and an upcoming mid-term election cycle that looks bad for Democrats, is climate change legislation dead for the foreseeable future?

Maybe not. A sleeper bill by Senators Cantwell and Collins that places a cap on carbon, auctions permits, and put a check into every American's pocket has been picking up steam (see positive editorials in the Economist, Washington Post, and Denver Post). It might just strike the right balance of job creation, simplicity, and populism to take off.

There are several reasons why this bill is a smart way to reduce our dependence on polluting emissions. First, it is a market-based approach--the cap ensures we get the emissions reductions we need, but businesses are free to achieve those reductions the way that works best for them. Companies aren't burdened by the government dictating how they must comply, and the strong economic signal will help generate innovation, investment and jobs rather than red tape.

Second, economists agree that auctioning pollution credits under a cap is more efficient than giving them to polluters for free. Rather than picking winners and losers before the game even starts, this bill sets a level playing field.

Third, auctioning the credits means returning the money to American families. The vast majority of the revenue raised from the auction will be divided up equally and returned to households in a monthly check. The refund they get will be bigger than the new energy costs that will inevitably come as companies pay more to pollute.

Finally, and in this political climate most importantly, the Cantwell-Collins approach is transparent, simple, and cuts out the special interests that are the object of (legitimate) populist backlash. The bill is short (less than 40 pages), has a straightforward mechanism to cut

emissions, rather than a labyrinth set of policies that very few can decipher, and can be monitored by every American to see exactly who is getting what for how much.

It is clear that the United States needs to move away from polluting fuels, and do so in a way that creates jobs for American workers. The cap, auction, and refund minimize the total cost to the American economy, because it does not dull price signals through convoluted giveaways, pass-throughs, or freebies. This keeps costs down by giving everyone the incentive to take advantage of the cheapest tools available to reduce energy use or clean up energy production.

Our reliance on fossil fuels imposes a complex set of environmental and economic problems: national security threats; rising sea levels that will raise our insurance premiums; and droughts that could threaten our food supply. Tackling these problems will require ingenuity, hard work, and foresight on both sides of the aisle and from all corners of our country. We cannot put off dealing with these issues because politicians in Washington want to close their ears and pretend they aren't happening.

But with problems this complicated, and skepticism of the American public this deep, we need to simplify the solutions. By cutting out the special interest, and focusing on the public interest, the Cantwell-Collins approach gives Senators from both parties, representing states as diverse as Washington and Maine, a reason to come together. If we want climate change legislation in the near future, it may be time for the rest of us to join the bandwagon.

ENERGY

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Black Water Rafting: When Will the EPA Enforce Coal Ash Laws in Alabama? (*The Huffington Post*)

Jeff Biggers

Author, "Reckoning at Eagle Creek: The Secret Legacy of Coal in the Heartland"

Posted: February 17, 2010 11:34 AM

What is the EPA's excuse now? Waiting for more torrential rain to host Olympic Black Water rafting competitions?

As heavy rains and snow worsen landfill conditions, this is the sentiment of besieged residents in Perry County, Alabama, who have been designated as the official keepers of toxic coal ash from the nation's worst environmental disaster--the TVA coal ash pond break in 2008.

Two weeks ago, the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) released a startling study that found that the EPA had allowed coal ash industry representatives to blatantly rewrite and water-down the potential dangers of coal ash in official government reports. PEER concluded:

During the Bush administration, EPA entered into a formal partnership with the coal industry, most prominently, the American Coal Ash Association, to promote coal combustion wastes for industrial, agricultural and consumer product uses. This effort has helped grow a multi-billion dollar market which the industry worries would be crimped by a hazardous waste designation.

The documents obtained by PEER under the Freedom of Information Act show how this partnership gave the coal ash industry a chance to change a variety of EPA draft publications and presentations, including -

Removal of "cautionary language" about application of coal combustion wastes on agricultural lands in an EPA brochure to be replaced with "exclamation point ! language" "re-affirming the environmental benefits...that reinforces the idea that FGD [flue gas desulfurization] gypsum is a good thing" in the word of an American Coal Ash Association representative;

A draft of EPA's 2007 Report to Congress caused industry to lobby for insertion of language about the need for "industry and EPA [to] work together" to weaken or block "state regulations [that] are hindering progress" for greater use of the coal combustion wastes; and
EPA fact-sheets and PowerPoint presentations were altered at industry urging to delete significant references to certain potential "high risk" uses of coal combustion wastes.

"For most of the past decade, it appears that every EPA publication on the subject was ghostwritten by the American Coal Ash Association," stated PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch, who examined thousands of industry-EPA communications. "In this partnership it is clear that industry is EPA's senior partner.

That was then--the Bush administration. This is now--the Obama administration.

Last year, the Obama administration released a previously held Bush administration EPA study on coal ash that demonstrated the clear dangers of coal ash, including cancer. Among many issues, the EPA concluded:

The coal ash threat could linger for 100 years -- Because some of the EPA data go back to the mid-1990s, it is possible that some of the listed dumps are no longer in use. The EPA warns,

however, that peak pollution from ash ponds can occur long after the waste is placed and is likely to result in peak exposures about 78 to 105 years after the pond first began operation.

- Higher cancer risk for up to 1 in 50 nearby residents -- The EPA estimates that up to 1 in 50 nearby residents could get cancer from exposure to arsenic leaking into drinking water wells from unlined waste ponds that mix ash with coal refuse. Threats are also posed by high levels of other metals, including boron, selenium and lead.

In a formal complaint lodged yesterday with the EPA, Alabama Hurricane Creekkeeper John Wathen charged the formal agreement with EPA and TVA says no ash can be shipped to any landfill that does not meet compliance standards.

Wathen and Perry County residents called on the EPA "to immediately halt the dredging of the Emory River in Kingston, Tennessee -- and hauling wet TVA coal ash to the Arrowhead Landfill in Perry County, Alabama -- until the landfill comes into full compliance with state and federal laws."

"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," Mr. Wathen writes in the letter.

"EPA Region 4 and ADEM have failed us," he says. "The situation here grows more dire with every rain event. Excessive water in the landfill is causing off-site violations, some intentional it seems."

Here are the photographs from Wathen that show pumps diverting liquid waste off the landfill property into adjoining ditches near residential homes:

Up to now, both EPA and ADEM are taking the operators word that no violations exist," he says. "I am presenting you now with overwhelming evidence that this landfill is not and has never been in complete compliance since the disaster ash started coming."

Here are some concerned residents:

According to Wathen,"arsenic and other pollutants of concern have been reported to EPA and ADEM, but no action has been taken."

Collection of material in the ditch has rendered two separate arsenic levels that exceed EPA safe drinking water standards, Wathen says, and one value much higher than the water quality criterion for aquatic life.

"While people do not drink from the ditch," he concedes, "it leads through private land where farm animals do drink from the surface water."

Mr. Wathen says EPA and ADEM have produced no reports showing evidence that any oversight has been conducted by the federal and state agencies charged with that by law. There are no reports of agency sampling or toxic releases data for the required inventory.

"I personally informed Mr. John Hagood, interim director ADEM, of these illicit night time discharges but he has chosen not to investigate," Wathen says. "Instead, all the report says is that Mr. Cook, landfill manager denies the claim. No tests, no samples, no interviews of employees or nearby residents effected, 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 by me."

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