

SEJournal

The Quarterly Publication of the Society of Environmental Journalists

Vol. 12 No. 2

The birth of environmental journalism

With this story by environmental journalism historian David Sachsman and a story inside on Lewis and Clark as one of our earliest "environmental journalists," the SEJournal begins a new effort to highlight some early movers and doers of environmental reporting.

An early history of environmental reporting and public relations

By DAVID B. SACHSMAN

David B. Sachsman, the George R. West, Jr. Chair of Excellence in Communication and Public Affairs at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, wrote his doctoral dissertation on *Public Relations Influence on Environmental Coverage (In the San Francisco Bay Area)* at Stanford University in the early 1970s. What follows is the beginning of the Introduction of that thesis, an early history of the development of environmental reporting and public relations from the end of World War II to the early 1970s. To make it easier to read, refer-

ences to "today" have been changed to "the early 1970s," etc.

Throughout most of the Sixties, unless a river was on fire or a major city was in the midst of a weeklong smog alert, pollution was commonly accepted by both the press and the general population as a fact of life. Until the late Sixties, conservationists were thought of as eccentric woodsmen and environmentalists were considered unrealistic prophets of doom.

Times have changed. By the early 1970s, environmental problems concerned many Americans. Mass media

coverage of environmental issues had evolved. Newspapers, magazines, books, and broadcast outlets offered the public a stream of information and opinion, much of which treated ecology seriously if not intelligently or completely. By then, both the media and the general population were aware that there was such a thing as an "environmental issue," and many mass media outlets transmitted environmental information and opinion to their publics.

What Rachel Carson had written about in "Silent Spring" in 1962 finally became a hot news story in 1969.

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SEJ 12th Annual Conference in Baltimore, Oct. 9-13. See page 6.

Inside Story

Mobile Register shows U.S. fails to protect seafood eaters from mercury

By ROBERT MCCLURE

Like many great projects, Ben Raines' year-long reporting on mercury contamination in the Gulf of Mexico started with a hunch.

While his wife prepared fish one night for their son, she asked her reporter-husband: How do you know this fish doesn't have high levels of mercury?

The answer to that question led Raines and his newspaper, *The Mobile (Ala.) Register*, on a quest for answers that now is reaping great rewards. Besides a handful of journalism prizes, including the National Press Club's Robert L. Kozik Award for Environmental Writing, Raines' stories have sparked rounds of new testing of

Gulf seafood and seafood eaters.

Raines had to do his own testing to achieve results. *The Register* first tested fish, then people. The results showed that the government was failing to protect consumers from contaminated seafood. In fact, the government had failed to check on the presence of the toxin in many fish despite obvious indications that they would be susceptible to such contamination.

Soon after Raines' reports, some of the world's leading mercury researchers launched a health study in the Mobile area. States along the Gulf Coast formed a task force to deal with the problem. At this writing, the National Marine Fisheries Service is testing some 2,500 fish samples, and the Food and Drug

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Saying 'so long' and thanks for SEJ's volunteers

Let me complain for a moment.

As I write this, it is 9:30 p.m., and my editors just told me I need to finish four weeks of reporting for a project in two. Mike Mansur, the *SEJournal* editor, has just reminded me that I'm several days late submitting this column. There are many other Society of Environmental Journalists tasks that await.

Meanwhile, my wife and I have developed a long list of projects we want to complete in our new (but 102-year-old) home. Especially in the last couple of years, she has occasionally accused me of having an affair—with SEJ.

It's not easy volunteering on top of a busy, demanding job as a professional journalist and desires to maintain one's marriage and family.

What's good, however, is that I'm not alone.

To be sure, SEJ has a crackerjack staff that, like a fine cabernet, only gets better with time. But this organization is also thriving because it has dozens of members who sneak some significant SEJ public service in during their workdays, over their lunch hours or at home in the evening.

This fact makes me feel especially good right now, as I come to the end of a challenging and especially rewarding two-year stint as president of SEJ. This organization is in good hands.

I feel confident that the SEJ staff and its volunteer board are making it easier for others to volunteer their services. And I also know that SEJ is only limited by the amount of volunteerism that we can marshal.

One thing to remember: This organization grows from all of us—the grassroots of environmental journalism—and especially because enough of us have stepped forward to give of our precious time.

It can come in the form of taking the time to share a story idea with *TipSheet*; to submit a story to *EJToday*, at the SEJ Web site; or to answer a colleague's call for help on SEJ-TALK—the listserv for members only.

Most recently, members have been giving of their time on the new SEJ First Amendment Task Force, which already has a mission and a work plan developed under the leadership of member Ken Ward Jr. Not content to merely plan for

next year, the group has also already begun to produce tangible products for SEJ members and the larger journalism community.

It has been monitoring and speaking out on First Amendment threats from so-called "Homeland Security" measures—a first for SEJ. Task force members have compiled information on EPA press policies to member Audrey Cooper, who prepared an article on them for other pages in this *SEJournal*. (See page 12.) And member Duff Wilson, whose tools-rich computer desktop graces many reporters' VDTs, has drafted a tools-rich FOIA corner for the SEJ Web site, www.sej.org.

Duff will serve as FOIA liaison with Investigative Reporters and Editors' First

terrific conference in 2004 at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

Last winter, Michael Rivlin spearheaded the hugely successful and well-attended Baltimore-to-Boston Briefing—giving SEJ a highly visible presence in the media-rich Northeast.

And many SEJ members are scrambling to fill their roles in helping to make the content of our annual conference in Baltimore this fall top notch. There are panels and tours to organize, beat lunches and breakfasts to host and other tasks.

No volunteer knows more about what goes into putting on SEJ's "big show" than board member Tim Wheeler, who has nursed this baby from conception several years ago.

The list goes on. There are too many people for me to single out in this column. Suffice it to say that I want to personally thank every one of you who have given time and energy to helping build SEJ during these past two years that I've served as president. You have made many things possible—including the prospect for a continued bright future. (If you are not currently volunteering, and you want some ideas on what you can do, visit <http://www.sej.org/about/index8.htm>).

As for my own volunteerism, I often ask myself why I have bothered.

I have lived for certain SEJ moments that I know will stick with me forever.

One was the tour to the Mexican border at our Tucson conference, where I saw first-hand the real product of "free trade"—the pollution problems and miserable living conditions of Mexican workers who make the conveniences of modern life for their rich northern neighbors.

Another was more private: while on a scouting visit for a future annual conference, having dinner with University of California international lake expert Charles Goldman. We shared a lake trout he had caught earlier that day from his beloved Tahoe; we listened to him recite poetry.

But, most important, I come back to the cause of promoting journalism.

Journalism is a noble calling, and it is under siege from all sides. To go into detail would take another column. Suffice it to say that for most journalists, it has grown much harder to do high quality, in-

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Report from the Society's President

By
**James
Bruggers**



Amendment committee. Both our organizations will benefit from such cooperation.

Another example is our new awards program. While demanding much of staff, the awards program is also a volunteer-rich effort.

Board member Dan Fagin, for example, labored over the early drafts of an awards program proposal and rules late into many evenings last year. And this year, a volunteer awards committee, led by board members Perry Beeman and Natalie Pawelski, guided a splendid number of entries through a judging process that will only bring greater attention to the best in environmental coverage.

Members Orna Izakson and Dawn Stover have launched a mentoring program that seems to have legs, as they say in this business.

Member Don Hopey has been quietly working behind the scenes to lay the groundwork for what I know will be a

SEJournal

SEJournal (ISSN: 1053-7082) is published quarterly by the **Society of Environmental Journalists**, P.O. Box 2492, Jenkintown, PA 19046. Membership \$40 per year (Canadian and Mexican journalists and students, \$30). Subscription fee \$50; \$30 library rate. © 2002 by the Society of Environmental Journalists.

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The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) is a non-profit, tax exempt, 501(c)3 organization. The mission of the organization is to advance public understanding of environmental issues by improving the quality, accuracy and visibility of environmental reporting. We envision an informed society through excellence in environmental journalism. As a network of journalists and academics, SEJ offers national and regional conferences, publications and online services. SEJ's membership of more than 1,200 includes journalists working for print and electronic media, educators, and students. Non-members are welcome to attend SEJ's national conferences and to subscribe to the quarterly SEJournal.

SEJournal on the World Wide Web at <http://www.sej.org>

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SEJournal is printed on recycled paper

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Winter '02	November 1, 2002
Spring '03	February 1, 2003
Summer '03	May 1, 2003
Fall '03	August 1, 2003

The life and times of www.sej.org

By CINDY MACDONALD

SEJ's Web site can help you now—more than ever.

The Web site is blossoming with new pages that report on what's out there to report on, as well as provide you with the tools to tweak your skills, get the job done and even blow your own horn afterwards.

I'm SEJ's Web-content midwife. With direction from the fertile minds of SEJ staff, namely Web site content editor, Chris Rigel, committed board members and a host of other volunteers, I am collaborating to usher into the world (wide web, that is) new pages designed to aid you in your efforts to report today's environmental issues. Some of these issues make headlines daily; others do not, but perhaps should.

A little history: SEJ's Web site made its debut in 1994, fathered by then and current Webmaster Russell Clemings. I came on board in December 2000, when busy Russ passed the majority of the Web work over to me. Since then, the Web site has undergone several growth spurts and visitor traffic continues to spiral upward. The number of page requests has increased 250 percent since June 2001.

Where are most of you visiting? In the lead, by a narrow margin, is the "Conferences" section (see sidebar), comprised of the main conference page, annual conferences, regional conferences, past annual conferences, past regionals and the new "How to Plan an SEJ Event page." Next in order of popularity, SEJ's news service introduced early in 2002, *EJToday*, tops the list, followed closely by old favorites "Useful Links," listing by topic more than 1,500 links beneficial to journalists reporting on the environment; *TipSheet*, a treasure-trove of biweekly news tips notifying journalists of potential environmental stories and sources—such as the 7/24/02 tip on the invasive, walking, air-breathing, predatory snakehead fish turning up in ponds across the U.S.; and of course, *SEJJournal*, SEJ's quarterly newsletter

packed full of tools, resources and SEJ news.

Long-established pages such as the "Careers" section, the member directory, and the listserv archives also receive lots of hits. (By the way, did you know you can track down old postings to SEJ-talk and SEJ-announce or search them by keyword?) Page requests come from all over the world, including around 5 percent overseas visitors and 1 1/2 percent Canadian. A good indicator for sej.org use is how many send applications for membership that have been downloaded from the site. In 2001, 136 Web applications were mailed or faxed to SEJ headquarters. Eight months into this year there are already 103, and the annual conference rush has barely begun.

In 2002, SEJ has introduced several resources just waiting to assist you in your quest:

1. SEJ's Strategic Plan 2002-2005 is available. It lists the steps SEJ is taking to ensure its long-term survival and its ability to fulfill its mission of advancing public understanding of environmental issues by improving the quality, accuracy and visibility of environmental reporting.

2. SEJ is committed to increasing diversity among the membership ranks and among journalists reporting on the environment. Without it, vital perspectives are missing from the reporting process. To that end, SEJ, together with partners Lamont Doherty Earth Observatory and the Earth and Environmental Science Journalism Program of Columbia University, offers annual conference travel fellowships, and provides links to related, non-SEJ fellowships on another "Careers" section page, Fellowships and Workshops.

3. SEJ could not function without the time and expertise donated by its many committed members. Find out how you can help (and have a blast doing it), on the new "Volunteering with SEJ" page. This is where you'll find an abundance of options to choose from, including "How to Plan an SEJ Event" in a neighborhood near you.

4. As a nonprofit organization, SEJ relies on financial support from philanthropic foundations, membership dues, annual conferences and from rental of our mailing list. With economic uncertainties, foundation support is never a given. Therefore, SEJ has created the 21st Century Endowment Fund as a way for committed individuals to make tax-deductible contributions and help anchor SEJ's financial future. SEJ does not accept gifts from non-media corporations, advocacy groups or government agencies. This makes your contribution vital.



Photo courtesy of The Baltimore Sun



New issues, such as the snakehead invasion, can be found in current or archived TipSheets.



Make a contribution, and you could see your name in an upcoming issue of the *SEJournal*—or not, as you prefer.

5. SEJ's 1st Annual "Awards for Reporting on the Environment" received approximately 250 entries. Judged this summer by panels of esteemed journalists and journalism educators (you can find out who in the Contest section), the winners will be announced at SEJ's 12th Annual Conference, Oct 9-13, in Baltimore, Md.

6. If you're a member having trouble logging in or finding members-only features, it's easy to access the members only section (see sidebar) where you'll find links to the member directory, the listserv archives, the latest edition of *SEJournal* and a log-in help page. This is the place to go if you've forgotten your password. As well, this section provides a link to the mentoring program, one of SEJ's latest initiatives for members. The program coordinators, Orna Izakson and Dawn Stover, match veteran environmental reporters with newcomers to the beat or with reporters who want to hone their skills. University-level students who have demonstrated an interest in environmental journalism are also invited to apply. Mentors and mentees commit to at least four communication sessions over a one year period. Just fill out a brief online application and our matchmakers will go to work.

6. Our latest addition to the family: SEJ's FOIA Web site, a place created to keep you up-to-the-minute on developments in this serious arena. I encourage you to visit often for tips on how to dig out information that has become less accessible since Sept. 11, 2001. (See related story, page 10.) Duff Wilson of the *Seattle Times* updates the content regularly. You can reach Duff at dwilson@seattletimes.com.

After you've used the tools on [sej.org](http://www.sej.org) and gotten the job done, you deserve to reward yourself. Share your hard work with your peers by submitting a story to *EJToday* using the simple online form (see sidebar) as well as in the annual conference "reading room," a showplace for SEJ members' work.

I invite you to contact me at cmac@golden.net if you require assistance locating information on SEJ's Web pages,

SEJ.org pages

21st Century Fund: <http://www.sej.org/about/index7.htm>

Awards for Reporting on Environment:

<http://www.sej.org/contest/index.htm>

Careers: <http://www.sej.org/careers/index.htm>

Conferences: <http://www.sej.org/confer/index.htm>

Directory: <http://members.sej.org/directory/index.htm>

EJToday: <http://www.sej.org/news/index2.htm>

Event Planning (SEJ Regionals):

<http://www.sej.org/confer/index5.htm>

Fellowships (SEJ conference travel):

<http://www.sej.org/careers/index5.htm>

Fellowships and workshops (not SEJ):

<http://www.sej.org/careers/index2.htm>

FOIA: <http://www.sej.org/foia>

Joining SEJ: <http://www.sej.org/join/index.htm>

Listserv Archives: <http://members.sej.org/lists/index.htm>

Members only: <http://www.sej.org/members/index.htm>

SEJournal: <http://www.sej.org/pub/index2.htm>

Strategic Plan: <http://www.sej.org/about/index10.htm>

TipSheet: <http://www.sej.org/pub/index1.htm>

Useful Links: <http://www.sej.org/resource/index4.htm>

Volunteering: <http://www.sej.org/about/index8.htm>

experience technical difficulties or have suggestions for improvements. I will be most happy to swiftly resolve the problem or point you in the right direction.

Cindy MacDonald is SEJ's Web content development associate.



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Written by journalists for journalists reporting on environment and related issues.

Subscription is free with membership. Journalists, professors and students may apply for membership at www.sej.org. Others may subscribe at the rates listed below:

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Baltimore 2002

PHOTO courtesy of The Baltimore Sun



If you still haven't registered for SEJ's 12th Annual Conference Oct. 9-13 in Baltimore, the good news is there's still time. But you need to act quickly, if you have any hopes of getting on the Thursday tour of your choice.

Be among the first journalists to visit a nuclear power plant since Sept. 11. Get out on Chesapeake Bay to see how oysters are harvested. Visit a military base where chemical-warfare agents are still stored. Find out how agriculture scientists are trying to combat farm pollution. Get cracking if you want to be on those or other tours.

Don't miss a star-studded lineup of speakers that includes Gaylord Nelson, former senator and founder of Earth Day, Nobel Prize winner Paul Ehrlich and President George W. Bush's top environmental adviser. Join the discussion about whether certain topics, like population and consumption, are

journalistic taboos, and consider how the Bush administration's environmental record is going to play in the fall elections.

Choose among dozens of concurrent sessions reviewing urban, coastal and global environmental issues, and environmental justice. Take advantage of journalism workshops featuring two-time Pulitzer winner Jon Franklin or Bob Steele, ethics specialist from the Poynter Institute.

Join in congratulating winners of SEJ's first annual environmental journalism awards, and browse among the fish at the National Aquarium. All that, and opportunities to meet and network with leading practitioners of environmental journalism from across the country.

Go now to www.sej.org and click on the Baltimore icon in the upper right corner to register on-line, or call (215) 884-8174 to have a packet mailed to you.



More awards, fine journalism and new academic pursuits

By GEORGE HOMSY

"It was like being on the moon. Everything was dead. No wildlife. No sounds." It made for a great television story, says **Joe Hart**, weeknight news anchor at KRVN-TV in Reno. Hart won the Radio Television News Directors Award (Northern California Chapter) for newswriting of his four-part series called "Afterburn." The programs examined the astounding devastation and the U.S. Forest Service-aided recovery of woodlands following a particularly bad fire season in the Sierra.

Sports. Coin collecting. Movies. Many of us fill idle hours with the mundane. **Ben Jacklet** of the *The Portland (Ore.) Tribune* found a man who spends his spare time protecting wetlands. Jacklet profiled Mikey Jones, a railroad worker who took on the Port of Portland, the Army Corp of Engineers and a half dozen other governmental agencies for illegally filling wetlands. Jones represented himself in court and won. Jacklet won in journalism. The feature captured first place in the news features category for non-daily newspapers in the Oregon Society of Professional Journalist awards.

Another Society of Professional Journalists' award was picked up by **Christopher Dunagan**, who found his story down by the seashore. Chris penned a two-part series for *The Sun* of Bremerton, Wa., about greater efforts to protect shorelines and an "almost revolutionary" property rights backlash against the resulting controls. The series, called "Preserving the Shoreline," won second place in the Pacific Northwest region's Society of Professional Journalists competition.

In May, freelance writer **Kathleen Hart's** first book came out. "Eating in the Dark: America's Experiment with Genetically Engineered Food," published by Pantheon, was four years in the making. Hart began the project after reading a report that one kind of genetically engineered corn is toxic to monarch butterflies. "I realized how little was known about either the environmental or the health effects of biotech crops. I felt driven to explore the science in greater depth." Her explorations took her across the United States and Europe. The resulting book received advance praise in *Publishers Weekly*, which called it "an exhaustive, balanced presentation" of the politics propelling the biotech industry.

David Ropeik, in his first book, is trying to put risk into perspective. The former Boston television reporter and honorary SEJ member has penned "Risk: A Practical Guide for Deciding What's Really Safe and What's Really Dangerous in the World Around You." "It was pretty surprising to find out how significant are the risks from medical errors, solar radiation and antibiotic resistance," Ropeik says, especially when compared to the risks people face from nuclear power or hazardous waste. By helping people understand the reality behind risks, he hopes the book will help people "make wiser judgments about how to live healthier lives." Ropeik directs the Risk Communication department at the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis in Boston. He has held risk seminars at the White House for Japanese agricultural leaders and for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in

Berlin. And Ropeik is still writing. He comments on National Public Radio and has written op-eds for *The Boston Globe*, *The Washington Post* and *USA Today*.

Another first-time book author is **Mary Losure**, the environmental reporter for Minnesota Public Radio. "Our Way or the Highway: Inside the Minnehaha Free State" is the portrait of an eclectic group of environmental and Native American activists who fought a highway through south Minneapolis. While covering the year-and-a-half protest, Losure realized that the story and its characters began to "add up to more than the parts you could tell in short radio pieces." She says the spontaneity of movements without official leaders fascinated her—and taught her an important lesson. "I think journalists, and society in general, have huge difficulties understanding any

Media on the Move

movement that isn't a hierarchy. I believe this is part of the source of our failure to penetrate Al-Qaida, which I suspect is organized more like Earth First! than like the FBI."

Deborah Cramer has made the study of the seas the focus of her latest book. She calls "Great Waters: An Atlantic Passage" a natural history of the ocean. Despite the seemingly broad topic, Cramer wants readers to "take the ocean as a discrete body of water and not a limitless unbounded sea that we can keep taking stuff out of forever." The freelance magazine writer has been writing about fishing for 15 years from her home in Gloucester, Mass. Still, she says, when she started writing the book, she was "shocked to see how life-giving the ocean really is."

Also out this summer was the second book by freelancer **Christine Colasurdo**. It's called "The Golden Gate National Parks" and was published by the Golden Gate National Parks Association. She says writing about the world's largest urban park was an enjoyable process. "The research entailed a lot of hiking over gorgeous country... The headlands are alive with red-tailed hawks, falcons, eagles, vultures and other birds. It's one of the largest raptor migration [grounds] in the country." The 64-page softcover book features the work of 22 photographers, including the late **Galen Rowell**, **Larry Ulrich**, **Brenda Tharp**, and **David Sanger**.

Jon Christensen expects to spend time working on his next book as a Knight Journalism Fellow at Stanford University. The Nevada-based freelancer has been covering western issues over the past twelve years for *High Country News*, *The New York Times*, *Outside* and Nevada Public Radio. Among the issues he wants to study is conservation biology, especially evaluating whether environmental conservation projects are conserving what they say they are conserving.

Freelance science writer **Cynthia Berger** is keeping current on marine sciences. She recently attended a weeklong workshop at the University of Maine at Orono as a Case Media Fellow. Boat trips, lectures and lobsters were all integral to the program that put Berger and other reporters in touch with the latest ocean research. Before joining the freelance world, she produced a

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Something new with Superfund this way comes

By MARGARET KRIZ

Early this summer, a sleeper of an environmental issue jumped onto the political radar screen. Superfund, that plodding 22-year-old program created to clean up the nation's worst hazardous waste sites, is once again news.

Superfund's resurrection as a political issue began early this year at the local level when environmental activists complained that the Bush administration had indefinitely postponed cleanup projects. In April, grassroots environmentalist Robert Spiegel testified before Congress that the Environmental Protection Agency had reneged on a promise. It was not going to remove toxic residues and clean up the groundwater at the Chemical Insecticide site in Edison, N.J. Local residents had spent 11 years pressuring the federal government to clean up the closed pesticide company site, and work was scheduled to begin in November. Early this year, EPA staffers told Spiegel that the plans had changed, and the agency couldn't afford to begin the project.

EPA regional office staffers, who were later silenced by EPA headquarters, echoed charges that the Superfund program is slowing down. When congressional staffers sought informa-

tion from Washington, top EPA officials said that it would be too difficult to compile information about the delayed cleanups.

The standoff between the Bush EPA and Congress ended in early July when Rep. John D. Dingell, D-Mich., released a government report listing the names of the Superfund sites on which the Bush administration had postponed cleanups.

Compiled by the EPA Inspector General's office, the report identified 33 sites in 19 states on which cleanup was tabled. Those projects would cost an estimated \$225 million to complete. After environmental activists and local politicians objected, however, agency officials in July reinstated funding to several of those sites.

Superfund could become a surprisingly potent issue in the November congressional elections. Republican and Democratic pollsters agree that voters are alarmed when they learn that hundreds of hazardous-waste sites have still not been cleaned up more than 20 years after the Superfund was created. Polls also show that voters oppose requiring taxpayers, rather than polluting industries, to foot the bill for toxic-waste cleanups.

Democrats on Capitol Hill complain that stories like Spiegel's are becoming all too common at hazardous-waste sites throughout the country. Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., accused the Bush administration of conducting "an absolute war against the Superfund program as we know it."

Boxer, who chairs the Senate Superfund subcommittee, noted that the Bush EPA has regularly fallen short of its cleanup goals. In 2001, the agency assured Congress that it would finish cleanups on 75 sites that year; in fact, they managed to complete only 47. Agency officials originally predicted that they'd clean up 65 sites during fiscal 2002 but now say the number will be closer to 40. That's way off the pace set during President Clinton's second term of 87 sites per year.

Democrats are also questioning why, during this fiscal year, the EPA has added only two sites to its National Priorities List. In the past, the agency added some 35 sites per year, choosing from among hundreds nominated by state and regional officials. Since 1980, the EPA has completed cleanup work on 258 sites and still has 1,221 sites on its priority list.

Despite the Inspector General's report, the Bush administration argues, correctly, that they have not cut funding for the Superfund program. For the last several years, EPA has consistently received \$1.3 billion for Superfund.

However, the regional officials say the additional \$225 million is needed to begin long-delayed cleanups. For their part, Bush administration officials reason that fewer Superfund cleanups are being completed because the agency is now tackling far more expensive projects.

"If you look at the universe of toxic-waste sites going forward, many of them are very complex mining or sediment sites, or federal facilities with a large amount of construction required" that will take a long time, argued Marianne Horinko, the EPA official in charge of the Superfund. Meanwhile, EPA administrator Christie Whitman pledged to keep up the pace of Superfund cleanups in a *New York Times* op-ed.

At the same time, industry is pressuring the EPA, saying the federal Superfund program has outlived its usefulness.

KEY CONTACTS:

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EPA media office: (202) 564-4355
www.epa.gov/superfund/

Rep. John D. Dingell, D-Mich.
Ranking Democrat, House Energy and Commerce Committee
Media contact: Courtney Johnson (202) 225-3641
www.house.gov/commerce_democrats
Inspector General's Report
www.house.gov/commerce_democrats/press/107nr54.htm

Sen. Barbara Boxer
Chair, Senate subcommittee on Superfund, Toxics, Risk, and Waste Management
Media contact: David Sandretti (202) 224-3553
www.senate.gov/~boxer/

American Chemistry Council
Trade association for large chemical manufacturers
Media Contact: Chris VandenHeuvel (703) 253-0619
<http://www.americanchemistry.com>

Issue in the News

"Superfund today is a mature program that has largely accomplished its goals," argued Michael W. Steinberg, a long-time industry lobbyist on Superfund issues. "It is appropriate today to think about what the longer-term needs are going to be and to anticipate that those needs will be dramatically reduced." Many industry officials want the states to take on local cleanup projects.

Industry lobbyists particularly oppose efforts by Boxer and others in Congress to reinstate the Superfund tax, which expired in 1995. Funds from that tax on chemical and oil companies were used by the federal government to pay for cleaning up hazardous waste sites when the site owners could not be located or had gone bankrupt. The Bush administration and industry officials are fighting the tax, arguing that it forces all companies to pay for the mess left behind by the worst polluting firms. But Boxer argues that without the tax, those cleanups are increasingly being paid for by the taxpayers, who also happen to be

voters.

Continued allegations that the Bush administration is slowing down the pace of the Superfund program and making the taxpayers pay for an increasing share of the cleanups could hold implications for the November elections. That may be especially true in districts that are home to some of the hazardous waste sites placed on the back burner by Bush.

As Democratic pollster Mark Mellman explains, "The notion that polluters ought to pay to clean up their mess is a bedrock principle with the American public. The fact that Republicans are now trying to shift the burden from the polluters to the taxpayers makes people extraordinarily angry. That's going to be a significant issue in the races this fall."

Margaret Kriz is an environment and energy correspondent for the National Journal.

Come to SEJ's 12th Annual Conference in Baltimore, Oct. 9-13, 2002.

<http://www.sej.org>



PHOTO courtesy of The Baltimore Sun

Media on the move...from page 7

radio series called "The Ocean Report."

Adam Glenn, who was recently promoted to senior producer—business and health at ABCNEWS.com, is heading back to India to teach Indian journalism students as a 2002 Ford Environmental Journalism Fellow. The fellowship, sponsored by the International Center for Journalists in Washington, D.C., takes him to Bangalore in southern India for a month in November where he will teach environmental journalism at the Indian Institute for Journalism and New Media. Then he takes his show on the road, running two weeks of environmental journalism workshops for professional journalists in New Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta. Joining him will be his Indian-born wife, **Mrinalini**, who some may remember from her computer workshop at SEJ's gathering a few years back at Sundance.

Recent graduate **Michael Coren** is also heading overseas. He recently secured a Luce Scholars fellowship to work at the Phnom Penh Post in Cambodia. One of his first stories will be in the Cardamom Mountains, one of the largest contiguous wilderness tracts remaining in Southeast Asia, "getting bitten by malaria-infested mosquitoes and devoured by leeches" while reporting on the conservation efforts there. This past May, Coren graduated from Emory University in Atlanta with a B.S. in environmental studies and a co-major in journalism.

First she writes, then she studies and, ultimately, **Heather**

Dewar hopes to teach. She spent the end of July and much of August in Hawaii, writing about forest restoration as a visiting journalist at *Environment Hawaii* magazine. This fall, Dewar will take a year-long break from *The Baltimore Sun*, where she is the environmental reporter, to complete a master of fine arts program at Johns Hopkins University with a concentration in science writing. Eventually, she plans to teach college-level courses on environmental reporting "and, in a perfect world, a literature course on American natural history writing."

In the meantime, yours truly is also heading back to school. This fall, I become the oldest master's degree student in Cornell University's City and Regional Planning Program. Why? Because I have come to realize that many issues we cover as environmental journalists come down to local and regional planning. Throw in education, taxes and the overall role of government and it becomes the ultimate balancing act. I want to learn how communities walk that tightrope. I will continue working for a handful of journalism clients, but most of my writing over the next two years will be aimed at academics.

If you are "on the move," let the world know. Send all professional news to George Homsy at ghomsy@rochester.rr.com. Or fax it to him at (253) 322-5176. (Don't call, I'll be up late studying!!!)

Dissecting dioxins: Understanding the new TRI numbers

By CHERYL HOGUE

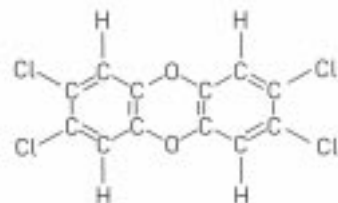
Each spring, the Environmental Protection Agency's unveiling of toxic release inventory (TRI) numbers provides fodder for environmental journalists across the United States. This year's release of TRI data, which covered the year 2000, for the first time included data on dioxins.

Overall, industries reported generating about 220 pounds of dioxins in 2000. Any facility producing at least 0.1 gram (that's 0.0035 ounce) of dioxins that year had to report under TRI.

Interpreting this release figure is a bit tricky. The TRI number does not equate to 220 pounds of TCDD, the really nasty stuff that often gets called by the singular noun "dioxin."

TCDD, short for 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-para-dioxin, was once dubbed "the most deadly chemical known." It came to fame as a contaminant in Agent Orange, a defoliant used by the United States in the Vietnam War. TCDD made Times Beach, Mo., famous. Creation of TCDD and other dioxins through incomplete combustion helps make incinerators unpopular.

But EPA's category of dioxins (plural) for its toxic release inventory is broader than just TCDD. It covers seven different dioxins and 10 furans, compounds that are chemically related to dioxins. All can be formed during incineration of household or hazardous waste or during production of chlorine-containing products such as polyvinyl chloride.



C = carbon
H = hydrogen
O = oxygen
Cl = chlorine

TCDD

them, unlike dioxin's three contiguous hexagons.

Each dioxin or furan molecule has eight places where chlorine atoms may attach. There are 75 different chlorinated dioxins and 135 chlorinated furans, all differing on the amount and arrangement of its chlorines. Each has its own degree of toxicity.

Of the 17 dioxins and furans that must be reported as part of the toxic release inventory, TCDD and a cousin with five chlorines (specifically 1,2,3,7,8-pentachlorodibenzo-para-dioxin) are the bad boys of the lot. Although the other 15 chemicals that EPA dubs "dioxins and dioxin-like compounds," also are hazardous, they are not nearly as toxic as these two. The lowest in toxicity among these are a dioxin and a furan each containing eight chlorines.

There are numeric conversions that "equalize" the toxicity

of dioxins. The most recent, adopted by the World Health Organization in 1997, assigns a "toxic equivalency factor" of one to TCDD. Dioxins or furans with six chlorines each have a toxic equivalency factor of 0.1, or a tenth that of TCDD. Others have even lower numbers. The dioxin and the furan with eight chlorines are the least toxic of the TRI bunch, each with a factor of 0.0001—ten thousand times less than TCDD.

So, what do those 220 pounds of dioxins on the TRI convert to in terms of equivalent TCDD toxicity?

The answer takes a little digging. EPA's Web database on the toxic release inventory only lists a collective number for all 17 dioxins and furans and does not break them down by specific chemical.

Amy Newman, a senior policy analyst for EPA, says some facilities reported only the aggregate releases of all 17 dioxin and dioxin-like chemicals (she calls them "congeners," or chemical variants). But 845 of the 1,274 facilities reporting dioxins and furans did break down their numbers – and they account for 97 percent of the TRI releases for 2000, she says.

Those providing specific information on the 17 congeners together released about 213 pounds of these chemicals. On a toxicity basis, that's equivalent to about 2.4 pounds of TCDD, Newman says.

She adds that EPA is considering calculating TCDD toxicity equivalency for dioxins and furans in future TRI numbers.

Besides toxicity differences among dioxins, there are other considerations to take into account when reporting TRI stories on this family of chemicals.

The EPA figures show only the dioxin compounds created by industries that have to file TRI reports. But this is not synonymous with the amount of dioxin released into the environment. Industrial facilities destroy some—if not much—of the dioxins they create. And TRI does not cover what might be a major source of dioxins—backyard open burning of trash and brush.

Despite these shortcomings, the newest TRI figures begin to track generation of dioxin by industry. In coming years, the public—including environmental journalists—will be watching for trends.



Cheryl Hogue reports on pollution-related issues for

References:

- Background information from Health Canada: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/iyh/dioxins.html>
- EPA's draft health assessment of dioxins (Chapter 9 contains toxicity equivalents for dioxin-like chemicals): <http://www.epa.gov/NCEA/pdfs/dioxin/index.htm>
- An industry perspective from the Chlorine Chemical Council: http://www.trifacts.org/tri_and_dioxin/mass_teq.php
- Environmental Media Services' list of researchers and activists concerned with dioxin: http://www.ems.org/dioxin/dioxin_contacts.html

Make that FOIA officer your key source

By JAMES V. GRIMALDI

Adapted from his presentation at the 2002 convention of Investigative Reporters and Editors.

My standard advice about using the federal Freedom of Information Act: Try not to.

In many cases you may be able to find the information you want some other way. It may be online. Perhaps you can shake loose the documents by simply making a call and asking for them. Remember that FOIA is only one tool in your arsenal.

But in some cases you will want to use FOIA, and it can help you unearth startling information. For example, in a story I wrote earlier this year, documents obtained by FOIA revealed that Enron refused to re-route a pipeline through an ecologically sensitive forest in South America—despite guidelines to the contrary by a U.S. agency that provided \$200 million in loan guarantees for the project.

Before you need to file a FOIA, read the statute. (Among other places, it can be found on the Environmental Protection Agency Web site at <http://www.epa.gov/foia/foiastat.htm>). Know the law and cite it when you are dealing with FOIA officers.

When you prepare to file a FOIA request, choose a strategy:

Strategy 1: Ask for exactly what you want. Find out through interviews how the system works and what documents the agency maintains that will tell you what you want to know. Ask for those documents. The key advantage here is that it can reduce turnaround time.

Strategy 2: Ask for more than you want. After this, you can negotiate to scale back your request. You can ask the FOIA officer to provide the documents in bundles: “Provide XYZ documents first, then I’ll see if I need more.”

Strategy 3: Make regular requests. If you are a beat reporter, you should regularly file FOIA requests. Ask for key documents, calendars, e-mails, correspondence, inspection reports, audits, budgets, etc. You may also want to FOIA agencies that are related and that might have similar documents. Sometimes, I have even gotten documents leaked to me, and then filed a FOIA request for the very same documents.

After you have filed your FOIA request, you should follow up by calling the FOIA officer. In fact, it can help to call the FOIA officer ahead of time. The FOIA officer might be able to provide some guidance about how long the request will take, and how you might modify the request to get quicker service. The officer may also know if the documents have been previously released, which can reduce turnaround time.

Get into the FOIA officer’s head. Remember that these people want to follow the law but also want to dispose of your request as expediently as possible. If you can show them a quick way to fulfill your request, you may be moved to the front of the line.

For example, try having a conversation with the custodian of the documents, then giving the FOIA officer the name and

phone number of the documents’ custodian. Think of the FOIA officer as a source, and not an adversary.

Don’t give up. Call at least weekly and ask how the request is going. Be a squeaky wheel.

Don’t back down. Always be cordial with FOIA officers—they are just doing a job. Be reasonable and make strategic concessions to exclude some items to which you are entitled (especially things you don’t really need.) But don’t allow them to exclude what you really want.

Make them justify denials. Always appeal as a matter of course. Watch for tricks. One agency has asked *Washington Post* reporters for extraordinary proof to grant fee waivers commonly given to the news media; call them and fight back. Challenge fee requests vigorously. Ask to review—and not copy—records; then copy what you need.

If you’re new to using FOIA, take advantage of the resources available online to help you. In addition to the SEJ First Amendment Task Force Web page, www.sej.org/foia, check out these sites:

- Society of Professional Journalists’ Freedom of Information site includes an overview to Freedom Of Information concepts and laws and a handy A-to-Z list on getting records. See <http://www.spj.org/foia.asp>.

- The American Civil Liberties Union’s “Using the Freedom of Information Act” is a step-by-step guide to the FOIA process. See <http://www.aclu.org/library/foia.html>.

- University of Missouri Freedom of Information Center offers forms, laws, tips and a wealth of resources. See <http://www.missouri.edu/~foiwww/>.

- The Right-To-Know Network is part of OMB Watch and provides free access to numerous databases, text files and conferences on the environment and housing. RTKnet has executive summaries of chemical plant risk-management plans filed with the EPA. See <http://www.rtk.net>.

You also should become familiar with the FOIA handbook for each agency you cover. It’s a valuable resource for negotiating with FOIA officers. You can say, “Your own handbook says...” Here are a few:

- Department of the Interior: <http://www.doi.gov/foia>
- Department of Agriculture: <http://www.usda.gov/news/foia/main.htm>
- Environmental Protection Agency: <http://www.epa.gov/foia/docs/foiamanual.pdf>

James Grimaldi is a reporter at The Washington Post.

Interested in learning more about FOIA?

For a step-by-step look at how to use the act, check out a Web page put together by Duff Wilson of *The Seattle Times* and other members of SEJ’s First Amendment Task Force at <http://www.sej.org/foia>.

SEJ survey finds EPA information policies vary by region

By AUDREY COOPER

When it comes to getting information out of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, some are luckier than others.

Some of us can't even ask questions of public officials at our EPA regional offices without notifying the press office. But colleagues in other states are free to directly contact scientists or other staffers for interviews, according to a recent SEJ survey of regional EPA media policies.

Some policies are written down. Others are more flexible. Some press officers see themselves as the ultimate media traffic cop. Others just want to know about interviews before they end up on the newspapers' front pages, the survey found.

Complaints from SEJ members about recent difficulties they had in getting EPA interviews convinced members of the First Amendment Task Force to look into the different regional press policies. The wildly different policies have also generated some interest among EPA press officers, who say there is talk about whether the policies should be more alike.

Certainly, some regions have adopted more strict media policies since the Bush administration took office, the survey found. There are also certain issues, such as "new source review," that EPA headquarters was asked to handle.

Here are the findings of the SEJ survey. Special thanks to SEJers Jim Bruggers, Elizabeth Bluemink, Ken Ward Jr., Mark Brush, Jean Hays and Robert McClure for contacting the regional press officers.

Region 1 (Me., Vt., N.H., Mass., R.I., Conn.)

Press officer Peyton Fleming produced a written media policy for his region. The policy says that the press office should be "the first point of contact" with the media and that "it is a regional policy that media inquiries will be handled by professional staff of the press office."

In practice, though, Fleming said his office encourages lawyers and other program staff to handle most calls from reporters, since those employees are usually familiar with the most newsworthy issues. While its policy requires and the press office prefers to be notified in advance of interviews, except those with the trade press, the region does not prohibit staffers from talking directly to journalists, Fleming said. Press officers want to be notified after all interviews that they didn't know about.

Region 2 (N.Y., N.J., Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands)

The chief of the Region 2 press office, Bonnie Bellow, said her office has stepped away from its written media policy, and has opted for a more informal policy that encourages reporters to first contact the media office for all inquiries. Reporters are then often referred to scientists on technical matters, Bellow said. The degree to which the press officer is involved in those subsequent interviews varies. For example, if an EPA scientist or staff member is known to be inarticulate at times (Bellow cited the example of someone who used a crass Sept. 11 analogy during an interview), a press officer may sit in on the interview. That also allows the press officers to more easily respond to follow-up questions, Bellow said.

There are exceptions. General EPA policy questions are referred to EPA headquarters. Also, field personnel are allowed to answer reporters' questions and then report back that the interview took place.

Region 3 (Pa., W.Va., Va., Md., D.C., Del.)

No written policy exists in Region 3, said spokesman Tom Damm. EPA staffers here are "advised to coordinate all press calls with our communications office to ensure the complete, timely and accurate dissemination of public information," he said.

EPA staff members here have been reluctant to cough up information without clearing it with the press office first. Some staff members insist on having the press office listen in on phone interviews, saying that is the "policy." No written policy existed during the Clinton administration either, said a former Region 3 press officer.

Region 4 (Ky., Tenn., Miss., Ala., Ga., S.C., N.C., Fla.)

The Clinton-era media policy here is on hold while a new policy is drafted. Meanwhile, the rules seem to be constantly changing. One SEJ member complained that she was asked to provide a list of questions to the press office.

The region's press officer, Carl Terry, said while the policy is being drafted, his office wants to handle all questions from reporters. Terry said reporters would be referred to EPA staff members if press officers couldn't answer a question. This wasn't always the case. Reporters used to be able to contact EPA senior managers, as long as those employees reported afterwards to the press office, Terry said.

The giant exception to the temporary PR-first policy is centered in the Air, Pesticides, and Toxics Management Division, where Director Winston Smith has demanded that he personally clear and direct all press traffic. This is a temporary situation. It's also one of the reasons for drafting the new media policy for the regional administrator to approve, Terry said.

The goal of the new PR-first policy will be to help reporters, Terry said. The press office will be better able to quickly find staffers, including cell phone numbers or pagers if the staffer is away from the office, he said.

Region 5 (Ohio, Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn.)

Reporters in this region are allowed to contact an EPA scientist for a story, although the policy may be changing. Region chiefs and EPA headquarters want to know if "major East Coast dailies" and television news magazines call for interviews, but staffers are generally encouraged to respond to reporters' questions and then notify the press office later.

All that could change soon. Recently, some news articles about the EPA caught Region 5 top brass off guard, and the regional administrator asked the press office to examine media policies in other EPA regions. The new regional administrator seems to favor a more restrictive policy in which all media calls go first to press officers, said press officer Jeff Kelley.

That policy had yet to be finalized by early August. Kelley said that until his office hears final word of a policy change,

they will continue to let reporters directly contact staff members who are comfortable talking to the media.

Region 6 (N.M., Texas, Okla., Ark., La.)

For the last several years, press officers in Region 6 have asked that all media calls go only to their office. Staffers who may be called directly by reporters are asked to tell the reporter to call the press office first.

From there, the press officers may handle the questions themselves, or pass the reporter onto a staff member. Yet when an interview is arranged with an EPA staffer, a press officer must also be on the phone, said Region 6's David Bary.

There are exceptions. Field scientists, remedial project managers and some Superfund staffers can speak directly to reporters. Also, staff members who feel comfortable dealing with reporters can have conversations without press officers listening in, as long as all conversations are reported to the press office afterward, Bary said.

Region 7 (Neb., Kan., Mo., Iowa)

The media policy here has also remained unchanged for several years. It is similar to the Region 6 policy. Press officers prefer that all media inquiries start at their office, where they will try to handle all questions. If an EPA staffer is a better source for the reporter, a press officer prefers to sit in on the interview, especially when the questions may cover controversial issues or policy questions.

Karen Flournoy, director of the external affairs office in Region 7, said staff members are allowed to speak directly with reporters without a press officer standing by if the questions are mostly technical or if the EPA staffer has a lot of experience.

Region 8 (Mont., N.D., S.D., Wyo., Utah, Colo.)

Press officers here are preparing for a rollout of a new media policy, which includes training sessions for staffers who frequently deal with reporters. Staffers are also expected to fill out a "record of communication" form in triplicate (other sections of the policy say duplicate) immediately following any interviews. The copies go to the staff member's supervisor, the press office and a congressional liaison.

The policy does not mandate that reporters first contact the press office. It also doesn't say press officers must listen in on interviews.

The new written policy says that while the region operates on the premise that the public has a right to know about their government's activities, some exceptions exist, including matters covered by the Privacy Act, enforcement negotiations, criminal investigations, confidential business information and certain privileged documents.

Staff members are allowed to respond to questions within their area of expertise, but are expected to know if a "communication strategy" is in place, or if (a) spokesperson is appointed for a given issue. Staffers are to meet professional standards in these contacts and confine their remarks to factual information, refraining from speculations, characterization of others' motives, etc. The press office also can name a single spokesperson for especially controversial areas, said chief spokesman Rich Lathrop.

Most reporters will also like the part of the new policy that discourages Friday press releases.

Region 9 (Calif., Nev., Ariz., Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, Trust Territories, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands)

Spokeswoman Lisa Fasano said her region's written media policy was so outdated that she doubted whether she could find a copy of it. Fasano said she believes that written policy is much more restrictive than what happens in practice.

Press officers here prefer reporters to begin with the press office so that they know what different reporters are tracking. The press office also understands reporters' deadline needs. The press office tries to get back to any reporter within an hour, but staffers outside the press office often think they're doing well if they return a call the next day, Fasano said.

Fasano said press officers generally prefer not to sit in on interviews, although they will if they know the staffer is overly technical or likely to ramble without ever answering the question.

Region 10 (Alaska, Wash., Ore., Idaho)

This region also has no written policy about dealing with reporters, although they are considering whether to adopt one, said spokesman Bill Dunbar, who described the current policy as "heavy laissez-faire."

Staff members are generally welcome to do interviews without first getting permission from press officers, although in certain situations the staffer is expected to check in with the press office. That includes particularly sensitive issues, and issues that cross program lines, such as something that the Superfund and water folks are working on together.

Press officers only listen in on interviews about one percent of the time, Dunbar said. Those instances usually involve a staff member with little media experience or someone who might be easily led to speculation.

The press office asks that staff members notify them after a reporter calls so that "we'll know what's cooking," Dunbar said.

Audrey Cooper is the environmental reporter at The Record in Stockton, Calif.



History... (from page 1)

Perhaps it was the dramatic Santa Barbara Channel-Union Oil leak that caused print and broadcast editors to begin taking seriously their own local problems of air and water pollution, overcrowding and the loss of natural resources. It was in 1969 that *The New York Times* created an environment beat—a practice that would be followed by major newspapers across the nation. It was also the year that *Time* and *Saturday Review* began regular environment sections, *Look* devoted almost an entire issue to the ecology crisis, *Life* greatly increased its coverage of the topic and *National Geographic* offered a 9,000-word article on man's environmental problems. At the start of the new decade, the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite was presenting an irregular feature called "Can the World Be Saved?" and Paul Ehrlich's "Population Bomb" was a best-seller.¹

It was no accident that the public and the media until the late Sixties accepted pollution as part and parcel of industrial society. Corporate public relations promoted this view and skillfully kept the public satisfied. The press rarely heard the bad news of industry pollution but often received good-news releases concerning industry pollution controls and the many benefits offered to the community by local industry.

After World War II, International Harvester built a new plant in Memphis, Tenn. Located in open fields, the Memphis Works burned coal and its big smokestacks spewed smoke, soot and cinders. New homes were then constructed adjacent to the plant and at the first hint of complaints (the air pollution was so bad that wash hung out to dry turned black, and windows had to be permanently closed), company spokesmen went door to door assuring homeowners that something would be done.

Before the homeowners could go to newspapers or public officials, they received a letter from the Works manager stating that the company was searching for a solution. For three long years, no pollution controls were installed and reporters did not write about the pollution. The people were apparently kept happy by the company's claims that it had spent \$68,000 on improvements. Much of this money was used to purchase 17 acres around the plant as a green belt to catch low-level debris—a very good investment. Finally, the company installed a device to trap most of the residue coming from the plant powerhouse. The final expenditure of \$71,900 gave International Harvester a reputation as a company concerned for the public interest.

To mark the installation, the company held a community meeting and press conference glorifying its efforts to solve air pollution. The first newspaper story ever carried on the issue was headlined: "IH Spends \$71,900 to Be a Good Neighbor."²

After World War II, in those isolated instances in which a

few citizens fought corporations concerning questions of land use, they faced skillfully designed corporate public relations campaigns and local media that generally accepted the industry arguments. To build a 90-acre research center in a residential neighborhood in Wayne Township, N.J., United States Rubber needed to bring about a change in the community's zoning ordinance. Stressing that buildings would be set back from property lines, the tract would be landscaped and there would be no offensive odors, traffic problems or water pollution, the company began a massive public relations campaign with a release to the press. Personal letters were written to local opinion leaders and community and state officials, booklets explaining rubber research were widely distributed, residents were invited to visit other rubber labs and company spokesmen met with various civic groups. With the press, local government and an estimated 90 percent of the people in its pocket, the company had little trouble quashing a suit filed by 10 property owners to prevent the change in zoning.³

In the International Harvester and the United States Rubber cases, only the corporations were producing press releases. By the late 1960s, the picture had changed. The media now received environmental releases not only from industry and industry-related institutions, but also from government agencies and officials, citizen-action pressure groups and other institutions such as universities. The rise of environmental awareness in the 1960s is perhaps due to what Richard W. Darrow, then president of Hill and Knowlton, the largest public relations firm, called the Great Ecological Communications War—a war between conflicting public relations forces.⁴

At least in part, the environmental information explosion is due to the realization by politicians that ecology is a safe issue (unlike war, poverty or taxes) and the use of public relations techniques (by officials, environmental activists and others) to expose the crisis. President Lyndon B. Johnson was one of the first national political figures to realize that being against pollution is good public relations.

Johnson said in his message to Congress, Feb. 8, 1965: "In the last few decades entire new categories of waste have come to plague and menace the American scene. These are the technological wastes—the by-products of growth, agriculture and science...Almost all these wastes and pollution are the results of activities carried on for the benefit of man. A prime national goal must be an environment that is pleasing to the senses and healthy to live in...Our government is already doing much in this field. We have made significant progress. But more must be done."⁵

As other government officials began to talk about the envi-

1. David Mark Rubin and David Peter Sachs, *Mass Media and the Environment*, Vol. II, Report of project supported by National Science Foundation Grant GZ-1777, September, 1971 (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University, 1971), Chapter Two, p.1.

2. John E. Marston, *The Nature of Public Relations* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1963), pp. 207-209.

3. David Mark Rubin and David Peter Sachs, *Mass Media and the Environment*, Vol. II, Report of project supported by National Science Foundation Grant GZ-1777, September, 1971 (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University, 1971), Chapter Two, p.1.

4. John E. Marston, *The Nature of Public Relations* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1963), pp. 207-209.

5. Paul Burton, *Corporate Public Relations* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1966), pp. 207-208.

Cover Story

ronment, the press began to treat ecology as a serious government story and the general public began to become increasingly aware that vital questions were involved. At the same time, environmental activists began flooding the media with releases, some media began environmental investigative reporting and public awareness was heightened by a series of ecological disasters. More and more, government officials realized that environmental action was more than a fad, and slowly they realized that they would have to add actions to their words.

As Walter J. Hickel explained: "When I took office in 1969 as Secretary of the Interior, pollution was no longer a joke; this fact was made clear by the nature of my confirmation hearings. The subject was aggravating millions of Americans; frustration and hostility were growing. The nation was desperately looking for leadership, and I decided that we should take the lead."⁶

The environment is in part a government story. Government officials and agencies are directly involved in decision-making that will determine the future quality of life, and they are responsible for a great amount of the public relations environmental material received and used by the mass media. Their words and deeds are regularly covered by the press.

Not only did the established, environmental activist groups learn that good public relations made for solid press coverage, but the many new activist groups also realized that public relations was the key to reaching the public. By the early 1970s, there were dozens of national groups, and a separate citizen action organization for every local issue—all trying to reach the public through the press.

Other institutions are also involved. Universities have information departments, as do many foundations. Educational institutions, especially, are now centers of discussion and study concerning environmental matters, and speeches and research often become press releases.

Finally, the environment is in part a business story, and corporate America is involved in a Great Ecological Communications War. As Darrow told the 1971 Economic Council of the Forest Products Industry: "The hour is later, Communications Time than it is Mountain Standard Time, for you and me and our colleagues at the control points of industry. We will do those things that earn us attention and gain us understanding, or we will live out the remainder of our professional lives in the creeping, frustrating, stultifying, stifling grasp of unrealistic legislative restraints and crippling administrative

restriction. A public that ought to understand us—and thank us for what we are and what we do—will instead clamor for our scalps."⁷

To answer this call and win the public relations war, corporate America is using the press release as the primary weapon.

The American mass media are faced with the overwhelming task of sorting through the barrage of environmental information and deciding what news to carry about environmental issues.

Author's Note:

I continue to believe that the 1960s was the key decade for the development of modern environment reporting and the battle between conflicting public relations forces. The 1960s marked the rise of the federal government as the most important source of environmental news, and the rise of television as a powerful, "visual" news medium. The Santa Barbara Channel-Union Oil spill was covered by television as a human-interest story of young people trying to save oil-soaked birds on the beach. The moving pictures of students in tears with dying birds in their arms were seen "up close and personal" by young and old across the nation. While most environment reporters then and now work for print media, the impact of television on the growth of the environmental movement deserves recognition.

Much has been written about the changes in America between the beginning and the end of the 1960s—in civil rights, women's rights, and in our response to the war in Vietnam, as well as in culture, music, and style. Our world today is so much a product of changes that took place in the 1960s that it may be hard to imagine the world as it existed in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 gave us a new way of considering our environment, and we have never been the same.

David Sachsman holds the West Chair of Excellence at the University of Tennessee Department of Communication.

6. Walter J. Hickel, "The Making of a Conservationist," *Saturday Review*, October 2, 1971, p.65.

7. Darrow, *Communications in an Environmental Age*, p.18.

President's column...from page 2

depth reporting—at least in the corporate media world. And I fear in the coming years that we are also going to find it much harder to obtain from our governments vital information on health, safety and the environment. In the name of preventing terrorism, governments will do what they often like to do: keep things secret.

So you see, SEJ has given me the opportunity to help shape an organization that nurtures one very important corner of this field—the one that focuses on bringing news of the environment to a public that needs this information to participate effectively

in democracy.

Maybe I shouldn't complain after all.

Thank you, SEJ members, for the opportunity to serve on your board, and thank you board members for entrusting me with the presidency.

James Bruggers is environment writer at The Louisville Courier-Journal.

Some lessons drawn from Lewis and Clark's adventure

By MICHAEL MANSUR

In 1995, before the nation became so fascinated with the explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, I followed their trail up the Missouri River. At the time, I was tracking the travels of William Least Heat-Moon for a series of stories for my newspaper. Heat-Moon's trip would later be published as "River-Horse: A Log of a Journey By Boat Across America."

On that trip several things became clear. They must have been thoughts bouncing around in my head for some time. But only when I got out there—on the river—did they become startlingly obvious to me.

First lesson: Learn to appreciate your area's natural resources.

This river—which actually is the nation's longest when measured from its proper source, Red Rock Lake, not far from Yellowstone National Park—is an important lesson in our nation's natural resources. It's a shunned beauty. For most of its existence with the white settler, it's been ignored. In Kansas City, most residents only know of the river from what they can see by driving over it. They think it's brown color means it's dirty. But, in reality, its color is fertility. Unfortunately, few understand that.

Second lesson: As journalists, we don't do enough journeying.

The words—journalists and journey—obviously have the same root. The first journalists were those who kept journals of their travels. Yet, most of us journalists today seldom travel.

It was just that, the journey, that made my stories about Heat-Moon work. I detailed in narrative form his struggle to travel across America in a boat. My story on his struggle up the Missouri probably enticed more people to read about the Missouri and how it had been dammed and altered, straightened and shortened, than could ever have been expected—short of the river catching fire beneath one of those commuter bridges.

Take the reader on a journey. Such a simple thought. But so seldom do we do it.

Third lesson: Lewis and Clark's interesting lessons go far beyond the stuff of Stephen Ambrose.

Following my trip, Ambrose's book, "Undaunted Courage," would capture the nation's imagination and cement for many the courageous tale of these early-1800 explorers. Obviously, their journey was remarkable. But my fascination with Lewis and Clark had another level, one that I hadn't even thought of before. They were, I concluded, the nation's first "environmental journalists."

Reading their journals, I was captured by their struggle to get up the Missouri, but also amazed by how much scientific and natural history they conveyed in their reports back to President Thomas Jefferson. These guys succeeded in painting a vivid and accurate picture of the land and the creatures they found. They were journalists.

Much has been made of their courage; but too little has been made of their role as "Pioneering Naturalists," as Paul Russell Cutright called the explorers in his book that carries that title: "Lewis & Clark: Pioneering Naturalists," published by University of Nebraska Press. I highly recommend the book as a

companion to the journals, especially for an environmental journalist who wants a vivid picture of the West before the white settlement.

Cutright maintains that circumstances prevented Lewis from writing a complete account of the Corps of Discovery's expedition. In April 1807, Lewis announced that he would publish in three volumes, a history of his much-acclaimed expedition. And the final volume would be "confined exclusively to scientific research, and principally to the natural history of those hitherto unknown regions."

A few months later, though, Lewis assumed his new duties as governor of the Territory of Louisiana. This distracted him from his book. And, about two years later, Lewis was dead, apparently the victim of his own hand.

In 1814, when "The Journals of the Expedition Under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark" appeared, it was void of most significant natural history and science discovered on their journey. The Philadelphia lawyer who had assembled the work, Nicholas Biddle, had had to do so without the help of anyone trained in science. Dr. Benjamin Smith Barton, a physician and naturalist, had to drop off the project due to failing health.

"The Biddle account accurately stamped Lewis and Clark as master explorers, superb woodsmen and exemplary military leaders," Cutright wrote. "However, because it excluded the great bulk of the scientific detail, it failed to portray the two leaders as important forerunners in such fields as botany, zoology, geography, cartography, meteorology and ethnology. In particular, it failed altogether to establish the true measure of Meriwether Lewis as a naturalist."

Cutright reported that Lewis and Clark received scant recognition for their scientific accomplishments until 1893, the year Elliott Coues, a foremost naturalist, edited a new version of Biddle's account of the explorers' journey.

In his book, Cutright tries to lift any remaining shroud of the explorers' accomplishments as naturalists and scientists. He details their journey, following their own journals, recounting specific entries. Then he adds, from his own reporting, the significance and meaning of the explorers' accounts. At the end of each chapter, Cutright lists the animals and plants that the explorers discovered. In total, the new species are more than 120.

The first of the new species that the explorers were to discover was the eastern wood rat. On May 31, 1804, just below the mouth of the Osage River in Missouri, the explorers recounted this strange animal, yet unknown to science.

"Several rats of Considerable Size was Caught in the woods today," Clark wrote. Later, Lewis added: "...the distinguishing trait of possessing a tail covered with hair like other parts of the body...it is as large as the common European house rat or rather larger, is of a lighter colour, the hair longer..."

Now, some may wonder the point of knowing, in such detail, what might have inhabited your home before white settlement. Who would care about them rats?

For an environmental journalist, I'd say this is crucial information. Only by knowing your place, and its original inhabitants, can you accurately report on it. Most of us don't know the trees in our own backyard, so knowing what lived there 200 or

For an environmental journalist, I'd say this is crucial information. Only by knowing your place, and its original inhabitants, can you accurately report on it.

more years ago may seem a stretch.

But I'd also argue that such knowledge can lead to wonderful and intriguing stories. Here's one example:

Reading the journals, I realized that the tree-covered hills around Kansas City, at the time that Lewis and Clark traveled through here, were once filled with green parakeets. It was mind-boggling at first to try and picture this. Sure we still have bright, red cardinals. Occasionally, an eastern bluebird. But bright green tiny parrots? It seemed unbelievable.

But on the days that the explorers encountered the Kansas River, which flows into the Missouri River where present-day Kansas City sits, Clark wrote they encountered "a great number of Parrot queets."

Cutright explained that although more than 500 different species of parrots have been described in the Western Hemisphere, only one, the Carolina parakeet, *Conuropsis carolinensis*, had inhabited the eastern part of the United States in the early 1800s.

"Lewis and Clark were the first to encounter this colorful

bird west of the Mississippi, and thus to extend its known range," Cutright wrote. "This event occurred long before the Carolina parakeet became extinct and joined the spectral company which now includes such other American Avians as the great auk, the heath hen and the passenger pigeon."

For years, I kept this thought in my head: I must find a story about the Carolina parakeet. And, eventually, the opportunity came. Chris Cokinos, a budding author and a teacher at Kansas State University, did a wonderful book on extinct birds, including the Carolina Parakeet. It was the hook for a story, finally, on my lost, green bird.

To do so, I traveled to the University of Kansas where the Museum of Natural History kept specimens of extinct birds. Cokinos had recounted examining the extinct parakeets there, so I wanted to see them for myself. I also anticipated that the scene might be the perfect way to open the story.

It gave me this lead:

"In death, they lie side by side like plucked ears of corn, brightly colored green, yellow and orange. They're strange birds, parakeets actually, and they've probably been in a drawer now for more than 100 years."

These are Carolina parakeets..."

And it gave me finally a chance to relate one of the most intriguing natural history facts of my hometown—facts that I only could learn from those famous explorers, Lewis and Clark, whom I like to think of as our first environmental journalists.

Michael Mansur is a staff writer at The Kansas City Star, where he covered the environment for a decade. He also edits this journal.

Inside Story...(from page 1)

Administration is mulling the possibility that cans of tuna fish may have to carry health warnings.

The *SEJournal* interviewed Raines recently to get the "inside story" behind his work on mercury contamination in the Gulf of Mexico.

Q. Tell me how you got started.

A. It started with my wife actually. She was going to feed some cobia, a big fish we have in the Gulf, to our little boy who was 4 at the time, and she said, "How do you know that doesn't have a lot of mercury?" I catch a lot of king mackerel and I turn them loose because the government has an advisory on them (for mercury). They still have the advisory. She pointed out that the king mackerel and cobia eat about the same thing, they're about the same size and they live in the same place. And a lot of the time you'll catch one, you'll catch a king, and a few casts later you'll throw another one out and you'll catch a cobia. So I said, 'The government says they don't have high mercury levels.' That started the wheels turning and I started digging in and I couldn't really find any records of cobia being tested. So we decided to test some, as well as other fish with similar dietary habits, like amberjack. And the first batch of tests came back and they were all above 1 part per billion.

Q. For the first story, it sounded like you bought some red

fish from fishermen?

A. We got the red fish from recreational fishermen. We didn't purchase those. We were given those. We purchased a lot of the others.

Q. What was your first round of testing—amberjack and cobia?

A. First round was red fish and red snapper...and amberjack in the first story...

Q. You basically found that sports fish caught in the Gulf and most commercial fish are not tested for mercury and you established with your own lab tests that there are levels of concern in at least a non-scientific sample of fish. You also used lab tests that showed some fish consumers exhibit mercury levels of concern to health authorities. And you showed that levels of mercury contamination around Gulf of Mexico drilling rigs were high enough to qualify as Superfund sites even though the waters around them are the target of many sports fishermen.

A. That's the gist of it. For the Superfund stuff, the rigs we examined ...qualified to set the wheels in motion to qualify for the National Priorities List, which is the first step toward Superfund. But that's not necessarily a Superfund site.

Q. Can you summarize the results?

(Continued on next page)

A. The U.S. Marine Fisheries Services is now undertaking a major fish-testing effort. They're doing a preliminary survey of 2,500 samples of a lot of the same fish we tested, as well as other near-shore and off-shore species. And they're going to examine fish caught near oil rigs and compare them to fish caught off Florida, to look for any connection to the rigs—in addition to trying to get some good numbers for overall mercury levels in the Gulf. The scientists there have made quite clear to us that our criticisms of the existing fish data are valid. The data has all sorts of holes and problems in it. A lot of it is just so old that it's not necessarily reliable.

And then, with our testing of people, a number of things have happened. One of the most interesting is the group that did the Ferrell Island mercury tests are here. They are in the process of doing a mercury test here, and they've cut the hair of about 400 people. We're waiting for the results now.

And there's now a White House task force on mercury, at the request of one of our senators. So that was a big deal.

Q. Didn't the state step up its mercury testing?

A. The Gulf States together did. They had several meetings where they established different task forces to start testing. They're starting public outreach campaigns to try and start to spread the word about what to eat and what not to eat. Right now they say the data is so crummy we don't know what to do.

Q. Summarize the reaction you got from the official bureaucracy, the consumer folks, the public?

A. When we did the fish tests, I'd say you could sum it up with a quote from one of our local Sea Grant guys, who said, 'Well, it's like it's almost no big deal. But now that you've found it in people, this is a big deal.' And he was especially agitated because we found it in both him and his wife.

Q. That was a great quote. How did you come to test the Sea Grant guy?

A. Well, another person I was testing took me over to his house. He wasn't there; his wife was there. I didn't realize who she was. He just introduced me to Roberta. I cut her hair and they said they ate a lot of fish. We didn't test the Sea Grant director until the next round of fish tests. The first story we just had his wife in there. But that started a lot of wheels spinning.

Q. Is red fish a local passion? And I'm wondering, was there any hate mail?

A. The local industry was certainly upset. We had a lot of meetings with them. A lot of people were very unhappy. One of our small towns here has an annual blessing of the fleet with a big seafood feast and they had a 'mercury soup.' That's what they called their gumbo that year. And they had a big sign about how no one has ever died from eating seafood. So there was certainly a lot of animosity. But at the same time a lot of people were realizing that maybe we need to do something about this. Maybe some of these other big fish do have a lot of mercury. We tried to stress throughout that shellfish and smaller fish aren't thought to have higher mercury levels. And a lot of the fish we tested had very low levels and we reported that as well.

Q. Was there any resistance internally to running the results, even though—and you made this clear to the readers—you didn't have a large enough sample to obtain a scientifically reliable average?

A. No, the attitude here was we were just trying to light a

fire. We talked to enough scientists who felt there was something there. We're a newspaper. We're not scientists. No matter how many samples we did, they would never stand up to the rigors of the scientific community.

Q. You were just trying to get scientists to run with this and do more tests?

A. When I first started asking about cobia, every scientist I talked to said, 'You know I haven't thought about that. They sure ought to have high mercury levels. That seems to make sense.' And there wasn't a great deal of surprise when the results came back. The state of Mississippi did the first two rounds of testing, so no one disputed the results.

Q. How did the state of Mississippi do the first round?

A. Well, I just asked them.

Q. Why not Alabama?

A. Alabama wasn't too interested, as I recall.

Q. You used whole fish. Why not fillets?

A. We purchased whole fish so we would know the size of the fish, which is very important. For instance, the king mackerel warning is predicated entirely on the size of the fish. From 24 to 30 inches, they're not included in the warning. From 30 to 39 inches, they tell you that you can eat one serving a month. And over 39 inches, you're not supposed to eat any. Our main criticism of all of the existing data was they didn't record the size of any of the fish. In cases where they did, we found they were testing fish too small to be kept in most states.

Q. Which is what led you to report that the testing system was fundamentally flawed?

A. Right. So we wanted to know how big our fish were. When we went to the fish wholesalers, it cost a lot more to buy a 40-pound fish than to buy a pound of it. But we felt we needed to have a whole fish.

Q. What led you to conduct your own tests? Was it necessary?

A. We didn't test any species that the government says has high mercury levels. We tested the fish that we suspected would have high mercury levels, based on their life habits and such. I think our results show that it was necessary. When you look at the existing data and see how flawed it is, I don't think we had a choice. Those fish weren't being tested by anyone. EPA results rely on the states. That's why there's so many fresh-water warnings. But the states test those fresh waters. Most of these fish occur outside those state waters. The FDA wasn't testing them. And the National Marine Fisheries Service wasn't testing them...So there was a lot of finger-pointing about who should be testing the fish, but the facts were that any of the federal agencies could have been testing them. And now one of them is.

Q. Tell me the problems you had in doing your own testing. And what advice would you have for reporters who want to do their own testing?

A. The first thing we did was we asked the lab what they needed from us and how to do it in a way that wouldn't screw anything up, that wouldn't skew the results. Having a good relationship with whatever lab you're using and finding a reputable lab that has the proper accreditation from the important government agencies.

Q. Going to a government lab cuts through that problem?

A. Yeah, but that door closed on us after we published our

first story. The state of Mississippi told us they couldn't do any more for us. There had been pressures that had come to bear.

Q. The labs are accredited by contaminant, right?

A. Right. On their Web sites, they list who they work for, like the Canadian government, or the Navy or the Department of Agriculture. And they have to pass certain tests every few years where whatever group, the state Health Department or USDA, will give them samples and have them test them. But they already know the results. We tried hard to get labs that would stand up to scrutiny. And that hasn't been an issue. But we also tried not to push our results further than we could. We always maintained we're not scientists and we're not doing a scientific survey.

When we found
fish with
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than the
government
suggested,
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to see
if it was
turning up
in people.

Q. So it sounds like it's best to have a lab that's accredited and used by government agencies?

A. Right.

Q. How did you get the idea to test people's hair and how did you find the people?

A. That just seemed like the next step. I've been fishing down here all my life. And I know how much fish I eat. I eat a lot of fish, probably four or five days a week. And I know people who eat a lot more than I do. When we found fish with a lot more mercury in them than the government suggested, we wanted to see if it was turning up in people. That was what was going to be important.

Q. How did you find the people?

A. I literally went around to places like boat ramps, fishing stores, restaurants, grocery stores, the local cafeteria I eat lunch in. The people I encountered on the street. And I asked people, 'Do you know someone who eats a lot of fish?'

Q. How much did you spend on lab tests?

A. Well, several thousand dollars. I'm not quite sure. Hair tests cost \$60 a piece and we did about 70. And we spent hundreds and hundreds of dollars just on fish. We didn't have to pay for the Mississippi lab work. They did that for free. But the follow-up fish tests, we had to pay \$30 a sample, provided it was homogenized, which we got a local university to do for us.

Q. Do you think reporters can look to universities to do the testing?

A. I don't know. Most universities are not equipped to do this....Preparing the samples is much different than testing them....We just kind of ...said let's get some fish tested. And we did that. And we said let's get some hair tested. And we did that. It was a kind of organic growth. The stories were published over a course of a year, now a year and half. It's not like we started out and said, we're going to do this, this and this. One story just grew out of another.

Q. You demonstrated that people along the Gulf Coast have some of the highest methyl mercury readings anywhere, right?

A. Once again, we're by no means saying these are averages. But we found people here with mercury levels that are among the highest in the world. There are people with much higher mercury levels...The average Inuit woman is 4.5 (ppm). And we had a whole lot of people far, far over that.

Q. The government says that anything over 1 ppm and you start to get concerned, right?

A. The EPA says. Exactly.

Q. You also found that FDA's 1 ppm 'action level' in fish doesn't spur any action. Has that changed?

A. No. There was a recent FDA meeting and one of the recommendations of the panel was that if more fish were found to be over 1 ppm they would be added to the do-not-consume list, which has four species: shark, tile fish, swordfish and king mackerel...Our testing showed a lot of species that would qualify for that. FDA's own data shows a number of species that should instantly qualify for that.

Q. Did you find the EPA to be very helpful?

A. Yes, very helpful. And we criticized them in our stories.

Q. I know the symptoms of mercury are very subtle. Do you think that's the reason why so little has been done about mercury in our diet?

A. There's plenty of reasons. The symptoms may be less subtle than we thought. But one reason is the government thought the fish had a lot less mercury in them than they have. We'll see when the testing shakes out. And when you look at the data from the national health data, it may be misleading. It shows 15 percent of the women may be over that 1 ppm level, but it doesn't show how far many people are over that level. This is precisely the story I'm working on this week.

Q. But the main reason is FDA didn't know how much mercury was in the fish?

A. Yeah, and the FDA hasn't done much publicizing of their advice, which was issued reluctantly. And there's a lot at stake. But fish is also good for you. I've been doing all these stories, and I still eat fish four or five days a week.

Q. Are you careful about which fish you eat?

A. Absolutely. I eat very different fish. I fish all the time. I used to go into the Gulf and catch the biggest of everything I could catch. That's how I was brought up. But I don't do that any more.

Q. Any final thoughts?

A. Yeah, the paper was so supportive, at every step of the way, even though it cost them a lot of money and there were no guaranteed results. I just went to them with a hunch. My editor, Bill Finch, supported me fully and all the way up the ladder. They laid out a tremendous amount of money and there were months of leg work before the first story....There were blistering letters...But they stood by me and I kept writing the stories. That was a great thing.

Robert McClure is a reporter for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

Breaking Gridlock: Moving Toward Transportation That Works

By Jim Motavalli.

Sierra Club Books. 320 pages. \$23.

Car haters beware: This book is more than just a rant against the way things are. In fact, it rants very little despite a stinging critique of the status quo with regard to a U.S. transportation system that guzzles energy, squanders resources and fails to deliver much satisfaction to people who simply want to get where they have to go.

Or do they? We tend to get the type of transportation system we demand, and although our demands are steadily changing—witness the evolution of the highway trust fund into ISTEA and the growing diversion of federal money to bicycle paths and mass transit—we still buy more SUVs than any other nation in the world and use less mass transit than any country in Europe. Those SUVs are one of the key reasons that corporate fuel economy gains have disappeared in recent years. If some Americans want a more efficient, environmentally friendly transportation system, others could not care less and, as a nation, we have a decidedly split personality on the issue.

But the noteworthy contribution of Jim Motavalli, the editor of *E: The Environmental Magazine*, is that he keeps a steady focus on the seekers, those seeking and crafting alternatives,

both the eminently practical and those whom contemporaries might view as visionaries or wild-eyed inventors. We learn about both the problems and the opportunities associated with their ideas and their machines, whether they be high-speed catamarans, fuel-celled cars, or high-speed trains or those, like Dave Burwell, who simply construct the legal framework for preserving abandoned railways as bicycle and pedestrian paths and thereby facilitate a minor revolution in how we move about the country. In the process of telling us all this, Motavalli assembles an impressive array of statistical detail, almost always conveyed in clear English that makes us understand the implications of everyday choices we make in moving about.

Those choices, it turns out, not only influence how our nation develops and where we live, but, in an often vicious circle, are often influenced by how we develop and where we choose to live. Metropolitan areas like Cleveland can grow 38 percent in developed land area at the very same time that they lose 11 percent of their population. When Motavalli surveys the state of affairs in a city like Portland, Ore., that is actually making some progress in reversing such trends, what becomes clear is that the reversal is the result of deliberate public policy and planning, not just a blizzard of individual decisions informed by environmental awareness. In fact, throughout the book, public policy plays a huge role in framing our choices, even as consumer choices in the purchase of vehicles exacerbate our problems and car companies gradually respond to changed preferences, as with Nissan's production of the hybrid car. There is no either/or between public and private decision making. Every decision affects all the others, and it becomes critically important that we become informed citizens and informed consumers at the same time. Reading this book is a good place to start.

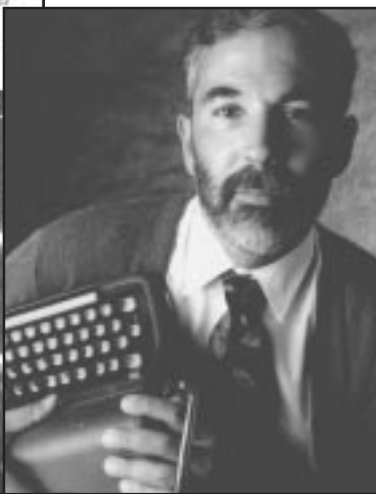
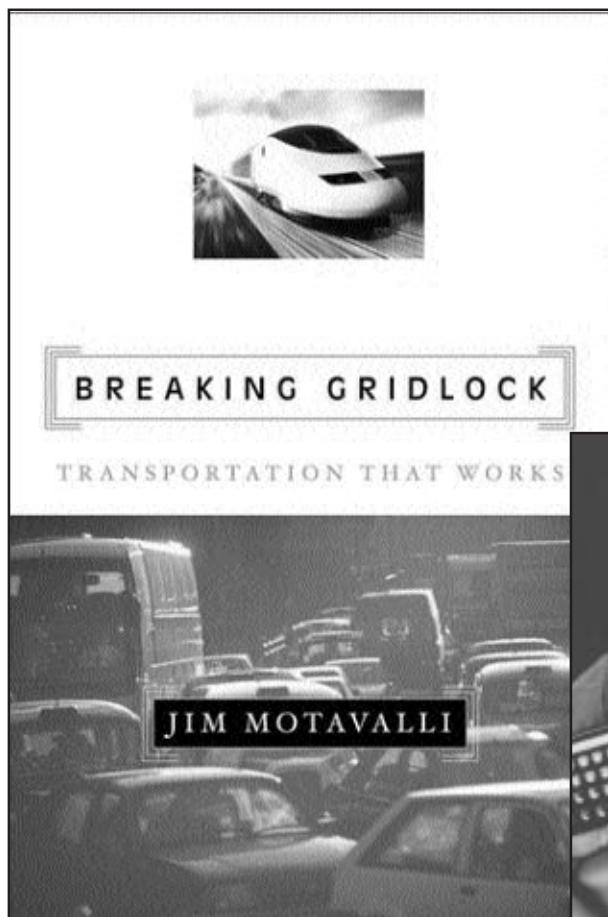
Motavalli finishes his sweeping review of virtually every aspect of modern transportation with some remarkable focus, a dozen lessons learned that he summarizes in his closing chapter. "Refuse to accept bottom-line thinking," he says, noting that the transit system investment that may never turn a profit is not a loser if we account for the thousands of commuters who might otherwise be blocking our highways. "Plan for transit," something Robert Moses, New York state and municipal official of last century, steadfastly refused to do, is another of his admonitions. Moses, in fact, consistently refused to allow transit rights-of-way in his Long Island parkways, seeing it as poor people's transportation. Here, at least, my own city deserves some credit. Most Chicago freeways have median rights-of-way that host

Chicago Transit Authority elevated train lines, one of which takes me to work daily. And I wouldn't give it up for the world. I get to read a book twice a day instead of sitting behind a steering wheel, cursing the traffic.

Now there's a positive externality: Mass transit keeps my blood pressure down and my learning curve up. This week I'm finishing "Uncle Tom's Cabin." It's about an old form of transportation called the Underground Railroad.

-Jim Schwab,

Editor, Zoning News



Environmental news from across the continent

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ARIZONA

► **Beyond the burn:** A pane of tribal, state and federal officials said logging to salvage wood from burned ponderosa pine trees needs to be done in the wake of the Rodeo-Chediski Fire. It began as two fires and quickly merged to form the largest blaze in Arizona history, scorching nearly 469,000 acres as it burned in late June and July. More than half the fire was on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation, which relies heavily on timber as one of its main sources of income. By Alisa Blackwood of the Associated Press.

► **Recycling profit?:** Tucson thinks its new recycling program can turn a profit. As New York and other cities slash recycling programs to cut costs, Tucson officials think their shift to once-a-week pickups will turn a chronic money loser into a profitable venture that also helps the environment. Mitch Tobin of the *Arizona Daily Star* reported this story on Aug. 4. Contact Tobin at mtobin@azstarnet.com or (520) 573-4185. Find the archive at <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/azstarnet/>. (Fee for full story.)

CALIFORNIA

► **Olives in the pits?:** A tiny, fast-spreading pest is sending shudders through California's olive industry, which is as old as the original missions and as new as the boom in boutique extra-virgin oil. The *San Francisco Chronicle's* story

by Carol Ness ran Aug. 14. Contact her at cness@sfchronicle.com.

COLORADO

► **Leaking waste dump:** More work is needed to contain chemical waste escaping the Lowry Landfill Superfund site, though there is no immediate threat to people or drinking water, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said in a draft progress report. The EPA cited several significant steps by the city and county of Denver and Waste Management in containing and treating waste at the site in Arapahoe County, but noted two continuing areas of concern. The story ran Aug. 20 in the *Rocky Mountain News* by Todd Hartman. Contact him at hartmant@RockyMountainNews.com or (303) 892-5048.

GREAT LAKES

► **Bigger ships in Great Lakes?:** A new study by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers says Midwest ports and shippers—and the businesses they work with—stand to gain billions of dollars from an expansion of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway system. Building wider locks and deeper channels from Minnesota to Montreal would make way for bigger "container" ships that have become the norm of international trade. But critics say expansion would have dire environmental consequences, and they say the Corps' study is full of flaws. Great Lakes Radio Consortium aired the story July 22 by David Sommerstein. Contact Mark Brush or Lester Graham at (734) 647-3472. http://glrc.org/story.php3?story_id=1562

► **Nitrogen pollution problems:** From mountain summits to ocean shores, plants and animals are suffering from exposure to the chemical nitrogen, according to a two-part series by Great Lakes Radio Consortium. Although nitrogen is a key building block of life, it can also be a pollutant so serious that some biologists rank its effects on par with global warming. Daniel Grossman produced the two-part series on the problem and on some of the efforts to reduce

nitrogen pollution. Aired beginning July 22. Contact: Mark Brush or Lester Graham (734) 647-3472. URLs are: http://glrc.org/story.php3?story_id=1548 and http://glrc.org/story.php3?story_id=1555

► **Forest futures:** Scientists are growing trees in a northern Wisconsin forest in a bath of greenhouse gasses. There's a theory that forests can help limit the predicted increase in world temperatures from global warming ... and its dire consequences. But early results suggest that Great Lakes forests might struggle to survive the century; doing little to help survival of the planet. Aired by Great Lakes Radio Consortium, July 22, by Bob Kelleher. Contact: Mark Brush or Lester Graham (734) 647-3472. http://glrc.org/story.php3?story_id=1576

FLORIDA

► **Manatee vs. Super Bowl:** Craig Pittman of the *St. Petersburg Times* reports July 14 on how Jacksonville's plans for revamping its gritty waterfront with expensive new development in time for the 2005 Super Bowl have run into interference from manatees. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has held up crucial federal permits for construction of what city officials have dubbed the "Billion-Dollar Mile" near Alltel Stadium because of concerns about how well local officials are protecting manatees in the St. Johns River. Meanwhile, more manatees are dying from watercraft collisions in the county at a near-record pace. Contact Pittman at (727) 893-8530 or craig@sptimes.com. http://www.sptimes.com/2002/07/14/State/Manatee_rule_s_crimp_S.shtml

IDAHO

► **No silver lining for EPA:** In a region with some of the worst and most widespread contamination anywhere in the country, many residents of Idaho's Silver Valley are, curiously, clamoring for the Environmental Protection Agency to butt the heck out. This despite the fact that, in the economically depressed region, the EPA cleanup of the worst

contamination, around an old smelter site, has actually proved something of an economic lifeline. Karen Dorn Steele's comprehensive report in the (Spokane, Washington) *Spokesman Review* spanned four days, from July 21 to July 28. Dorn Steele can be contacted at KarenD@SPOKESMAN.com or (509) 459-5462. <http://www.spokesmanreview.com/library/silvervalley/cover.asp#>

LOUISIANA

► **West Nile breaks out:** Mike Dunne of the *Baton Rouge Advocate* reported almost daily on the outbreak of West Nile virus. The mosquito-borne disease made hundreds of state residents sick and killed more than eight as it broke out in Louisiana and also advanced in other states. See the newspaper's "special report" West Nile page at http://www.theadvocate.com/s_virus. Contact Dunne at mdunne@theadvocate.com or (225) 388-0301.

► **Cure worse than disease?** Mark Schleifstein of *The (New Orleans) Times-Picayune* reported Aug. 7 that although the pesticides being used to kill mosquitoes pose only a small risk to humans, experts recommend that pregnant women, children and those sensitive to chemicals should go inside when the spray truck or plane comes. Schleifstein can be reached at mschleifstein@timespicayune.com or (504) 826-3327. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/newsstory/spray07.html>

NEVADA

► **Nevada test site museum:** A collection of memories and memorabilia from more than 1,000 nuclear weapons experiments both above and below ground at the Nevada Test Site will one day be on display in a proposed museum just off the Las Vegas Strip. The University of Nevada System, the Desert Research Institute and the National Nuclear Security Administration are teaming up to bring more than one million records under one roof for the public and for scholars to see and to study. The Smithsonian Institute is also lending its expertise to

the project. The story ran in the *Las Vegas Sun* on July 5. Contact Mary Manning at (702) 259-4065 or manning@lasvegassun.com

► **Tungsten in humans:** Federal health officials said that urine tests on leukemia patient families and Fallon control group families showed high levels of the metal tungsten in the bodies of both groups. "Our results engender several questions," said Dr. Carol H. Rubin, chief of the health studies branch at the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Where is it coming from and how is it getting into people's bodies?" The story ran in the *Reno Gazette Journal* by Frank X. Mullen. Contact him at (775) 788-6330 or fmullen@rgj.com.

NEW YORK

► **Cancer cluster bust:** *Newsday* examines how governments, scientists and activists are trying, and often failing, to address widespread worries on Long Island about possible links between cancer and the local environment, including neighborhood cancer clusters. The first three segments were published beginning July 28 and the final three segments began on Aug. 11. Contact reporter Dan Fagin at dan.fagin@newsday.com.

MAINE

► **Plum Creek problems:** In June, *Northern Sky News* reported on Plum Creek Timber Company's first three years as one of Maine's largest landowners. Phyllis Austin wrote that although the company has mostly stayed out of the headlines since it purchased 900,000 acres of Maine timberland, it has been dogged by environmental problems such as cutting down a tree with an eagle's nest, and violating the terms of a conservation easement through excessive cutting near a trout pond. Now Plum Creek is selling lots in the largest subdivision ever proposed in Maine's north woods. For more information, contact *Northern Sky News* at (207) 338-2012.

MASSACHUSETTS

► **Windmill tilting on Cape Cod:**

In the August issue of *Northern Sky News*, Wendy Williams reported that Doug Yearley, former CEO of mining company Phelps Dodge, is budgeting \$3 million to defeat a wind farm proposed for Nantucket Sound. Yearley's Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound claims environmental concerns, but others say the group's supporters are more concerned about protecting the view from their seaside estates. For more information contact Wendy Williams at (508) 477-6025.

► **Alien weed woes:** A stinging 15-foot-tall poisonous weed from Asia has been sighted in Massachusetts, packing a sap that can cause acute pain, severe blisters, scarring and perhaps blindness. David Arnold of *The Boston Globe* reported on July 25. Contact Arnold at arnold@globe.com.

MISSOURI

► **Butter-flavoring hazard:** More than 30 workers at a microwave popcorn plant in Jasper, Mo., have developed severe lung diseases that federal health investigators attribute to workplace exposure to butter flavoring. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has detected similar cases in plants manufacturing flavorings or packaging popcorn in Iowa, Nebraska, Ohio, New Jersey, Maryland and Indiana. "I think what we know about this is probably the tip of the iceberg," NIOSH lead investigator Dr. Kathleen Kreiss said. Published in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on Aug. 1. Contact reporter Sara Shipley at sshipley@post-dispatch.com or (314) 340-8215.

OHIO

► **Unsafe fish program cuts:** The fish are still not safe to eat, but Ohio will no longer tell you that. John C. Kuehner of *The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer* reports that the state has cut its program that warns the public about how much and how often pollution-contaminated fish should be eaten. The story ran July 31. jkuehner@plaind.com or (216) 999-5325 http://www.cleveland.com/ohio/plaindealer/index.ssf?/xml/story.ssf/html_standard.xsl?/base/news/10281150113250.xml

OREGON

► Fires' effects probably benign:

Michelle Cole of *The Oregonian* reports that, notwithstanding news reports about damage done by fires in Southwest Oregon earlier this year, scientists do not anticipate any negative long-term effects. The report focuses on the Siskiyou National Forest, a biodiversity hotspot, which is adapted to fire naturally. Tom Aztet, a U.S. Forest Service ecologist, says of the well-publicized fires, "They're really not out of the range of normal events. The one thing I really need to look at, after the smoke clears, is whether there was a higher proportion of high-intensity fire than what might have been if we hadn't been so aggressive in trying to suppress fire over the years." Cole can be reached at (503) 294-5143 or michellecole@news.oregonian.com. The Aug. 19 story is at http://www.oregonlive.com/news/oregonian/index.ssf?/xml/story.ssf/html_standard.xml?/base/front_page/102975811717582.xml.

► Protections ground rockfish

fleet: Some 8,000 square miles of ocean off the West coast will be closed to trawlers—a shutdown even bigger than the famous 1994 restrictions for the New England fleet at Georges Bank. The latest closure is the result of a decision by the Pacific Fishery Management Council to protect dwindling populations of the dark-blotched rockfish, reports Jonathan Brinckman of *The Oregonian*. The shutdown is necessary because federal authorities allowed the fishing fleet to catch too many rockfish from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. Brinckman is reachable at (503) 221-8190 or jbrinckman@news.oregonian.com. The Aug. 17 story is at http://www.oregonlive.com/environment/oregonian/index.ssf?/xml/story.ssf/html_standard.xml?/base/news/1027079803213600.xml.

RHODE ISLAND

► Paint corporations sued for sell-

ing leaded paints: This little state with a big lead problem is the first in the country to sue paint corporations for selling leaded paints long after they knew of the health impacts. In the September issue of

Northern Sky News, Steven Stycos reported that R.I. Attorney General Sheldon Whitehouse will meet Glidden, Sherwin Williams, Atlantic Richfield, and DuPont in court. In 2001, Stycos wrote, 8 percent of the state's 6-year-old children had elevated blood lead levels, and the unlucky children were concentrated in low income neighborhoods in old mill towns. For more information, contact *Northern Sky News* at (207) 338-2012.

TEXAS

► **Swimming hole horror?:** Barton Springs Pool in Austin, Texas—the only spring-fed swimming hole of its kind in the middle of a major U.S. city—has long symbolized the natural amenities that help make Austin a hip place to live. But benzo(a)pyrene has been detected in its sediments four times since 1995 at levels that increase the risk of cancer after prolonged exposure, reports Kevin Carmody of the *Austin American-Statesman*. Nobody, including the 350,000 people who swim there yearly, realized the level was sometimes above the state's safety standard until the newspaper examined the testing data. The story ran Aug. 9. Contact Carmody at (512) 912-2569 or kcarmody@statesman.com

VIRGINIA

► Reviving an oyster ecosystem:

Nags Head Woods Preserve steward Aaron McCall anchored the small skiff in the southeastern corner of the Pamlico Sound, dove in and disappeared under the water. Seconds later, he surfaced with a large piece of marl. It's part of 600 tons of rock dumped on the bottom by The Nature Conservancy in hopes of growing oyster reefs. Michelle Wagner's story ran in the July 26 *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*. <http://www.pilotonline.com/news/nw0726oys.html>

WASHINGTON

► Tribes poisoned by fish?:

Native Americans in the Columbia River basin are eating contaminated fish at a rate that is likely to increase their rates of cancer and other diseases. Yet they will continue to eat the fish, reports Lisa Stiffler of the

Seattle Post-Intelligencer, in part because it's an ingrained part of their culture. An EPA study analyzed 132 contaminants in fish taken from traditional tribal fishing spots, and concluded the risks of contracting cancer or showing effects on the liver, immune system or physical development are quite high compared to standard regulatory limits. The story ran July 31. Contact Stiffler at (206) 448-8042 or lisastiffler@seattlepi.com. The story is at http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/local/80720_columbia31.shtml

► Urban wildlife populations

exploding: What civilization has done in terms of increasing the stocks of certain animals isn't pretty: Legions of rats, crows, 'possums and raccoons. Inadvertently, people have aided huge and unnatural increases in the populations of critters that like wide, open spaces and eating out of garbage dumps, among other features in the human civilization, reports Mike Lewis of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Meanwhile, well-known declines have resulted in other species less well-adapted to life in the 'burbs. "Call it survival of the blandest," Lewis wrote on Aug. 6 "Or, in harsher terms: Eat trash or die." Contact Lewis at (206) 448-8140 or mikelewis@seattlepi.com. The story is at http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/local/77545_crow06.shtml.

► Rainier's glaciers stopped lava:

Researchers have discovered that a massive battle went on for eons on the flanks of Mount Rainier in Washington. The volcano would spew lava, but for much of the last million years, it was no match for the rivers of ice that coated the sides of the 14,410-foot peak. Contact Craig Welch of *The Seattle Times* at cwelch@seattletimes.com or (206) 464-2093. The Aug. 19 story is at <http://archives.seattletimes.nwsource.com/cgi-bin/texis.cgi/web/vortex/display?slug=glaciernatwonder15m0&date=20020715&query=welch+and+glacier>

► Elwha dam breaching pre-

pared: Scientists are constructing a "before" picture of the Elwha River on Washington's Olympic Peninsula in preparation for demolition of two dams that block miles of salmon spawning habitat. It represents one of the best hopes

for beefing up the flagging salmon runs of the region because the vast majority of the spawning habitat to be opened up is in pristine country in the Olympic National Park, reports Lynda Mapes of *The Seattle Times*. Mapes is at (206) 464-2736 or lmapes@seattle-times.com. The story is at http://seattle-times.nwsource.com/html/localnews/134516760_elwha19m.html

WISCONSIN

► **Chronic Wasting waste:** Chronic Wasting Disease has consumed much of the time and budget of wildlife officials at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources in the last few months. The disease threatens to do major damage to Wisconsin's deer herd, and this has everyone from butchers to politicians in an uproar. In mid-August, President Bush blocked \$18 million targeted to fight C.W.D. in several states. The situation has been well-covered by state media and has been the focus of some national stories as well. For more information, contact Gil Halsted at Wisconsin Public Radio, (608) 263-4110.

► **Closed beaches:** Many beaches along the Wisconsin shoreline of Lake Michigan were closed to swimming for much of the summer. The water was fouled by a variety of sources, including algae, gull droppings and partially treated sewage dumped by the Metropolitan Milwaukee Sewerage District. The situa-

tion has triggered various lawsuits, meetings and reports that more swimmers are headed to inland pools. Steve Schultze of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* has written extensively about the sewage dumping issue, including on August 19. Call Schultze at (414)-224-2000 or go to www.jsonline.org.

NATIONAL

► **Environmental price-tag:** Ecological economists say each time some environmental resource is destroyed, it costs dollars. Economist Robert Costanza says environmentally friendly policies can mean significant economic value. In 1997, Costanza, who co-founded the International Society for Ecological Economics, estimated the global value of nature's benefit between \$18 and \$61 trillion each year. The story ran on Salon.com on Aug. 19. http://www.salon.com/tech/feature/2002/08/19/environmental_accounting/index.html

► **Home waters security:** David Helvarg's article 'If By Sea' in the September issue of *Popular Science* looks at Coast Guard and other government efforts to secure America's ports and 95,000 miles of coastline from terrorist attack. He also examines how marine environmental survey and protection technologies are now being adapted for "Home Waters Security." Contact Helvarg at (202) 364-3368 or

Helvarg@aol.com. The story is available at www.Popularscience.com

► **Prairie dog problems:** Prairie dogs have been the scourge of those who work the land since pioneer times and their ravaging tunnels are a modern problem across the plains states, from the manicured lawns of Lubbock, Texas and the cemeteries of Superior, Colo., to soccer fields in Lincoln, Neb. and cattle ranches in Edgemont, S.D. Kris Axtman of the *Christian Science Monitor* reported the story on Aug. 13. Contact him at axtmank@csps.com.

CANADA

► **Fisheries failing:** Canadian scientists urged their federal government to close one-third of all the fishing zones on both coastsΔ21

. That, according to University of British Columbia's Daniel Pauly, an expert in international fisheries, is the best way to prevent a major collapse in fisheries. The team of scientists published in *Nature* the results of a study linking better harvesting techniques and stock diminution. If Canada does it, says Daniel Pauly, it would give the country the moral ground to demand action from other countries. Aired on Radio-Canada (The French arm of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) on Aug. 8. Written by Yanik Dumont Baron (604) 662-6214 or yanikdb@radio-canada.ca.

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