

SEJournal

The Quarterly Publication of the Society of Environmental Journalists

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A FOIA state of mind

By MICHAEL MANSUR

If there is one clear thing that can distinguish you as an “investigative reporter” it may be this: You regularly file freedom of information requests.

Most reporters can fill their days by attending press events, interviewing sources or monitoring public meetings for the latest information. You can run such traps each day and produce many good stories.

But you will never set yourself apart as an enterprising reporter, an “investigative reporter” if you don’t independently seek documents and data. And most often that requires filing with local, state or federal officials what’s become known as a “FOIA,” a freedom-of-information request.

Ken Ward, the distinguished environment reporter at the *Charleston (W.V.) Gazette*, says he feels a little less than whole if he hasn’t filed a records request in a week. For many reporters that may be a difficult goal.

But filing at least a couple FOIAs a month might be a very

attainable goal. On my beat – covering local government for *The Kansas City Star*, which sometimes involves an environmental story – I may file three to six information requests a month. Many of these are required because the local government wants that piece of paper in their files in order to produce the records. Sometimes, they also want it in order to be able to charge you fees for their time to run computer programs or search for the records.

Often I find that such requests produce data that public officials have never analyzed. Analyzing it yourself and producing a story will put you, not your sources, in control of the story. It’s just such pieces that make the news at the top of the hour or the top of A1. Often, they’ll spawn numerous follows, as well.

What follows are a number of key points to keep in mind about filing freedom-of-information requests, followed by a sample letter offered by Seth Borenstein, who writes about the environment in Knight Ridder’s Washington bureau.

These tips come from me, Ward and other veteran reporters

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Inside Story:

“In Harm’s Way” details Houston’s air-pollution problem

By MIKE DUNNE

Houston is often cited as one of the cities with the nation’s worst air pollution, but finding the data to show the exposure levels of those who live near the polluters seems nearly impossible.

But the *Houston Chronicle* found a way – by enlisting about 84 chemical plant and refinery neighbors to operate simple air-quality testing monitors and assembling the data.

The *Chronicle*’s environment reporter, Dina Cappiello, said she knew early upon her arrival in Houston that she wanted to do something definitive about air pollution. The result: “In Harm’s Way,” a series that ran Jan. 16-25, and that continues with follow-ups.

The series got an immediate response from Houston Mayor Bill White, who said he would order more monitoring and make sure those violating the law would be held accountable.

The *Chronicle* monitored air quality in four neighborhoods adjacent to oil refineries and chemical plants over the summer, using a monitor that measured 31 chemicals. Eighteen of these chemicals are known to be hazardous to human health and are considered air toxics.

The four neighborhoods were in three Texas counties that federal statistics say ranked among the highest in Texas for haz-

ardous air pollution in 2002. In selecting the neighborhoods, Cappiello also considered the number of “upsets,” or accidental releases by area companies.

The *Chronicle* sought 25 monitoring sites in each of the four neighborhoods. She went door to door, sent letters and found 84 participants willing to monitor the air at their homes. Sixteen more sites were set up by the newspaper in public places, like parks. Anonymous volunteers were not allowed to participate.

Each volunteer was surveyed about air pollution in his or her community. They were trained for half an hour on how to operate the monitors and given instruction when to open and close them and where to put them.

In most cases, volunteers were given 24 hours’ notice of the test day. The goal was to start the test at all 25 monitoring sites in a neighborhood at the same time.

At the end of each test period, the monitors were taken down, collected within the hour and transported within 48 hours to the laboratory at the University of Texas School of Public Health in Houston to be analyzed.

The *Chronicle* calculated the maximum, minimum, median

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SEJ focuses on mission and prizes integrity above all

By **PERRY BEEMAN**

We journalists learned early that all we have is our integrity, a reputation for fair and accurate reporting. For SEJ, the lesson is the same. The SEJ board knows that our nonprofit, nonpartisan, educational organization will always face skepticism. The skeptics – some of them our bosses, unfortunately – will always wonder if we care more about Birkenstocks than brownfields, about tree-hugging more than technology. At least until they take the time to learn what we do.

That's why SEJ's integrity is so important that the board has consistently listed it as one of the top guiding principles in our organization's strategic plan. That's why the board is working now to add new statements to conference materials to make it clear who we are, which is one thing, and who attends the annual conference, which is a broader question.

SEJ, established legally as a nonprofit educational organization, is a journalism organization devoted to improving coverage of environmental news. We don't lobby. We have no political agenda.

Under our legal status, most of what we do is in the public arena. Much of our website is accessible to anyone, and we are legally required to open our conference to the public. People from all walks come to the annual conferences for various reasons. We invite many speakers and moderators and exhibitors. The event draws journalists, vendors, interest-group members, corporate public-relations workers, spouses, scientists, government employees and an array of other folk. Many of them are not SEJ members.

Sometimes, our "big-tent" approach attracts visitors interested in challenging our status as an objective organization with only one agenda – improving the quality, accuracy and visibility of environmental journalism.

Occasionally, questions arise about standing ovations given to speakers, some of whom represent a particular political viewpoint. Once in a while, someone writes a story for another publication purporting to expose some great bias among SEJ's ranks.

Remember what SEJ is and is not about. We are a group of journalists and journalism educators. Newspaper reporters are the biggest subset of our 1,400 members, followed by freelancers. We also have TV folks, online journalists, podcasters and professors. Our members also include folks who write for publications some may associate with environmentalists or environmental groups. These members are journalists, not public-relations workers or lobbyists. Our strict membership guidelines exclude anyone who is paid to do public relations or to lobby.

We don't give people an ethics code, require a performance test to join, or somehow sanction members based on some set of rules. We are an educational organization that supports freedom of speech and freedom of information.

Conference attendees are not all journalists guided by their employers' ethics code, or even personal ones. Some are not journalists or SEJ members. All are free to react as they like to speakers, within the law and with civility. We want decorum, but we don't want to censor anyone. We've seen standing ova-

tions, catcalls, heavy applause for specific comments and grunts of disbelief.

The board would like folks to know that those are personal expressions, protected by the First Amendment. The reactions aren't some kind of official SEJ position statement.

Of the 719 people attending the Pittsburgh conference, more than 390 were nonmembers. Over the years, we've had actors portraying Teddy Roosevelt, Rachel Carson and a zebra mussel. We even had a wolf under the care of a handler; SEJ representatives did not control the animal's actions. SEJ's board also had no control over the person, allegedly a board member, who appeared in Pittsburgh as Batman. We had 32 fellowship winners at Pittsburgh, 58 guests and a whole bunch of speakers and moderators. It was a grand, diverse gathering.

There is plenty of room for confusion in the sessions. SEJ strives for balance on the panels, but cancellations happen. Sometimes, speakers cancel at the last minute, leaving a panel weighted more toward one viewpoint or another. That can lead to misguided charges of bias.

Some have questioned the boisterous expressions of approval or disapproval that punctuate some sessions. We aren't going to demand that every speaker get a standing ovation, or tell people they can't stand, or applaud, or cheer, or remain silent.

This isn't to say SEJ members don't give standing ovations. Some choose to politely applaud while seated. Some don't applaud at all. Some give standing ovations, perhaps out of courtesy to a strong speaker, regardless of political orientation. We don't

tell members or anyone else how to react.

Board members are working to make sure moderators at major SEJ panels or keynote addresses get at this diverse-audience point, perhaps in a humorous way. We may tell speakers that they shouldn't be offended if they get a standing ovation – or don't – because we have a mix of journalists and non-journalists in the audience. Some journalists are the sit-quietly-and-watch type.

We tell people about SEJ and its mission via the listservs, the conference, the *SEJournal*, our regional events, brochures, advertisements and our contest.

The message is this: We are a journalism organization dedicated to improving environmental coverage. We support free speech.

In the daily grind of journalism, and when so many people gather for a conference, controversies happen. That's OK. We work in the marketplace of ideas, after all. We want discussion, debate, thought and insight.

We also want to make sure that everyone understands what SEJ is, and what it is not.

The board is dedicated to making sure SEJ keeps its integrity and its reputation as one of the great journalism organizations on the globe.

Report from the Society's President

By
**Perry
Beeman**



Perry Beeman, SEJ board president, writes for the Des Moines Register.

SEJ Journal

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Editor

Mike Mansur

Assistant Editor

Mike Dunne

Design Editor

Orna Izakson

Section Editors

BookShelf	Elizabeth Bluemink
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Denny Wilkins (chair), Elizabeth Bluemink, A. Adam Glenn,
Mike Mansur, Robert McClure,
David Sachsman, Paul D. Thacker, JoAnn Valenti

SEJournal will accept unsolicited manuscripts. Send story ideas, articles, news briefs, tips and letters to editor Mike Mansur, *Kansas City Star*, mmansur@sej.org. To submit books for review, contact Elizabeth Bluemink, bookshelf@sej.org. To submit to *The Beat*, contact Mike Dunne, (225) 388-0301, mdunne@theadvocate.com.

For inquiries regarding SEJ, please contact the SEJ office, P.O. Box 2492, Jenkintown, PA 19046 (215) 884-8174; Fax: (215) 884-8175; E-mail: sej@sej.org.

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Got guano?

SEJ 2005 annual conference: Let's get big in Texas

By DINA CAPPIELLO and KEVIN CARMODY

Everything is bigger in Texas, and that goes for the environment too. We have it all, y'all: from the vistas of Big Bend, which are tarnished by haze; to the Gulf Coast, where energy companies are drilling for natural gas and eyeing pristine beaches for LNG terminals. Bill Moyers now tops the list of confirmed speakers.

SEJ's 15th Annual Conference in Austin Sept. 28-Oct. 2 promises to be as big as the state – and the University of Texas – that are its hosts. For the first time, we are reaching out to journalists from Mexico and Latin America, introducing some bilingual sessions and infusing SEJ with the Hispanic culture that is so central to Texas and reporting on environmental issues.

Thanks to Austin's awesome public transportation system, we've dismissed many diesel-burning charter buses, and instead will be transported through the city on public buses and the city's 'Dillos, which make rounds of the city's restaurants and night life.

Conference attendees will also board flights for the first time for Thursday's all-day tours, jetting to Houston to see one of the world's biggest petrochemical complexes, and a city that has some of the worst air pollution in the country. NASA astronauts will likely show us the Earth from above, and what such a humbling experience has taught us about environmental change.

Other jaunts will take you to the caves around San Antonio

where some of the most pristine water in the state flows. Unfortunately, it's water that is needed for growing cities and for the endangered critters that live among the karst. (Karst is a type of underlying terrain, usually formed on carbonate rock (limestone and dolomite) where groundwater enlarges and shapes openings to form a subsurface drainage system.)

A bus will also head north to Fort Hood, one of the biggest bases in the U.S., where we will explore the Department of Defense's desire to be exempt from federal environmental laws.

In Austin, we'll listen to live music, eat barbecue, talk about the problem of electronic junk in this cyber-city, and visit the Lady Bird Johnson Wildlife Center and the Bob Bullock Museum. We will even have the first beat dinner on a hill where at dusk the largest population of Mexican free-tailed bats takes flight. Guano, anyone?

Our goal is that you will take home lessons from Texas that will enable you to cover your beat, teach environmental journalism and dispense eco-news better than you did before coming to the Lone Star State.

And like the state of Texas, which bridges East and West, we will feature topics to interest journalists on both sides of the country.

So get ready to experience the twang, big hair...and even bigger boots...and a good dose of Molly Ivins, who has agreed to welcome us to Texas. Yee haw!



Pittsburgh conference draws 700 people and high marks

By JAY LETTO

SEJ's annual conference, held in Pittsburgh Oct. 20-24, 2004, attracted 719 registrants, including 326 journalists, academics, scientists, environmental advocates, government officials and business leaders.

SEJ welcomed 32 fellowship winners to the conference, hosted by Carnegie Mellon University, through specially funded programs targeting U.S. journalists of color, Canadian journalists, Ohio journalists, freelance journalists and Mexican journalists. A student rate – made possible by generous project funders – allowed SEJ to encourage attendance by those so important to the future of environmental science, science communication and journalism. SEJ's conference attracted two reporters from Africa, one from Malaysia and 24 from Canada (including 12 fellows). Four Nepalis and one Liberian journalist registered for events in Pittsburgh but were not able to attend.

Electronic evaluation forms allowed staff to collect 93 forms, by far the best return ever and nearly twice as many as previous years.

The common refrain from attendees is that SEJ's field trips make SEJ conferences great and different than others. SEJ planners have heard this for years, coupled with the complaint that members don't want to spend field trip time on a bus or in a room – they want to be outdoors, somehow or another, in the environment. Planners will continue to let new tour leaders know this.

From the survey question: please give us your basic evaluation of this year's conference – where SEJ received 76 "GOOD"

replies, 6 "BAD" replies and 10 "MIXED" replies – these two best captured most attendees responses: "Great job. Solid information, good sources. Beautiful venues. Awesome last-night party. Exhausting;" "The breadth of topics was impressive. And the sense of focusing on material that would be useful rather than simply airing environmental concerns was quite strong. Very well organized, from the field trips to the plenary talks to the panels." And this response: "I think the SEJ conference is a crucial asset and a great networking opportunity for the environment reporter. I would have welcomed more hard science, though. The beat dinners were an asset, though I have heard that the quality of some was not as high as for others. I thought that SEJ should have done a better job at integrating newcomers to its world – especially the fellows, who became almost transparent at the conference."

Note that 63 of the 93 respondents said this was the only journalism conference they attended this year. Anecdotally, top newspaper reporters generally didn't attend any other journalism conference.

Also, while having one's employer cover expenses ran about 50/50 for members, it's the hardcore newspaper contingent that often pay their own way to get to the SEJ conference.

Twenty-one out of 75 members said they filed a story from the conference. SEJ Headquarters reports 63 stories that were either conference coverage or news stories born out of conference sessions or events. This is most likely not a complete list, just the stories that reporters informed SEJ about.

(Continued on page 6)



Kevin Carmody: 1958–2005

Founding board member and award-winning journalist lived SEJ's mission

By CHRIS RIGEL

Kevin Carmody, a founding board member of the Society of Environmental Journalists, died unexpectedly on Wednesday, March 9, at the age of 46. His death is being investigated as a suicide. Why SEJ is suddenly without one of its first and longest-burning lights is unfathomable to us, his colleagues and friends.

Kevin co-edited the *SEJournal* for its first six years, first with Bowman Cox, managing editor of Growth Media Group, and later with Adam Glenn, a senior producer for ABCNEWS.com, and Amy Gahrn, freelance writer and editor. I had the privilege of working with him as *Journal* designer for a year and a half. Kevin worked tirelessly with his handful of volunteer writers and editors to keep the journal going. For instance, when the Fall 1994 issue had no one to do the layout, Kevin did it himself, along with editing, gathering and compiling what was then known as the "Green Beat" section, getting the issue to print and into the mail while holding down his other responsibilities.

This is the way he approached his work, his volunteerism with SEJ and his play: a no-holds-barred approach to life that yielded great journalistic achievement, cornerstones and keystones in building the SEJ community – and some really great fish, like the 10-pound trout pictured here. Kevin pulled that trout out of Lake Michigan in the summer of 2000.

Kevin served on SEJ's board of directors from the beginning of the board's existence in 1990 until his death. He was secretary of the board from 1992 until October 1996, when he became board vice president, and in October 1997 to October 1998, president. During his presidency, Kevin's family grew with the arrival of his daughter Siobhan. Kevin wrestled with the idea of leaving the board altogether, but settled for playing a less demanding role by stepping down, for the first time, from the executive committee. He subsequently returned to the executive committee, serving as treasurer October 2000 to October 2001, and he continued to play leadership roles with *SEJournal* and in developing policies on membership and finance.

As board member and current treasurer Peter Thomson said, Kevin was "the only board member ever to hit for the cycle, holding at one point or another every office on the board."

In 1996, Kevin co-chaired SEJ's 6th Annual Conference in St. Louis along with Mike Mansur, then board member and current editor of the *SEJournal*. Kevin also was co-chair of SEJ's 15th Annual Conference, to be held this fall in Austin. His vision and creative energy are already deeply imbedded in the program and will be carried on by his co-chair, Dina Cappiello, conference manager Jay Letto, and the rest of the conference team. Randy Loftis of the Dallas Morning News has stepped up to the co-chair position.

Kevin's approach to reporting won him dozens of national awards throughout his 26-year career, including a 1999 George Polk award for the *Daily Southtown* series "Deadly Silence" that exposed an official cover-up of the deaths of employees exposed to beryllium while working on the A-bomb in the 1940s. That report of misconduct prompted Congress to compensate the victims or their heirs. Among his other recognitions are the National Headliner and Thomas Stokes awards.

Kevin's file at SEJ is stuffed with stories like "Death in the Air," a special report in the *Austin American-Statesman* exposing builders who ignored asbestos laws, putting workers – especially day workers, mostly Mexicans – at risk, and the 2003 *Statesman* story on chemical contamination at a popular Austin swimming spot, Barton Springs Pool.

Kevin's file at SEJ is stuffed with stories like "Death in the Air," a special report in the *Austin American-Statesman* exposing builders who ignored asbestos laws, putting workers – especially day workers, mostly Mexicans – at risk, and the 2003 *Statesman* story on chemical contamination at a popular Austin swimming spot, Barton Springs Pool.

"Kevin was as dedicated to science as much as he was to journalism," said SEJ's Executive Director Beth Parke on March 11. "His respect for scientific accuracy and his take on those who misuse science were a big part of his leadership within SEJ. Ethics in science, ethics in journalism: Kevin was all about those things. He thought all environmental journalists need to be well educated in science to do their best job. But science was also a personal joy to Kevin. I remember how he absolutely lit up when talking about his experience during the science journalism program at Woods Hole, and the awe he felt learning to sequence his own DNA there. He was an admirer of many scientists and followed the work going on in many fields."

Kevin took risks in his reporting, doggedly investigating in the face of criticism and even threats. Close friends and associ-

(Continued on page 19)



Kevin Carmody, daughter Siobhan and a 10-pound trout.



Pittsburgh... (from page 4)

Following is a (somewhat) chronological look at what attendees saw as successes or failures of the conference:

1. The Celebrity plenary on Wednesday, Oct. 20, was an even split on whether folks liked it or not. Many respondents were pleased with the session, especially Ted Danson's comments, as reflected in this comment: "I found it entertaining, which is useful after a long day. It was good to hear Ted Danson's celebrity's-eye view of the coverage environmental issues receive when attached to a famous person." Three complained about the standing ovation for surprise visitor Teresa Heinz Kerry, including this one: "I found it awkward that the audience – as reporters – gave Teresa Heinz a standing ovation."

2. Thursday tours had by far the highest attendance ever. This is probably due to two reasons: We had the most tours ever and we had an attractive Wednesday evening program.

The Frank Lloyd Wright tour, the Green Building mini-tour and the Longwall mining tour all won tremendous praise. Here is a sampling of the kind of comments our Thursday tours (and mini-tours) regularly get: "Probably the best session at any conference that I've ever attended. From the tour of the longwall mine to visits to homeowners who've been impacted, this was excellent. I will use some material in a story I'm working on longwall mining in my state." And "Excellent tour. Well thought-out and very informative."

Complaints about Thursday tours (this year and past years) can be summed up by this comment: "Too much bus riding and talking to us. We spent probably all of 30 minutes out of a bus or nature center. I went to see more of Presque Isle and its issues, along with Lake Erie/Great Lakes problems."

3. Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and applause-gate at the Oct. 21 evening reception garnered 50 "GOOD" replies, 5 "BAD" replies and 11 "MIXED" replies. While the response was quite varied, two comments sum up attendees' views: "Excellent. A moving speech, and a most informative firestorm on the [SEJ-Talk] listserv afterward." (Listserv archives are available at the sej.org, members-only site.) And: "RFK stemwinder was quite provocative, I was not prepared for the standing ovation. Are we environmentalists or journalists? As they say, is it beat or bias?" (See *SEJournal* Vol. 14, No. 3.)

4. The U.S. EPA Administrator Michael Leavitt keynote address (41 "GOOD" responses, 6 "BAD" and 10 "MIXED") generally gained universal praise mainly from interest in hearing from high-level administration officials. But most people acknowledged that he said little, very smoothly. Sample responses: "Well done. Slick. Party Line. Fascinating." and "What a smooth talker! Always a great get to have the EPA administrator." One of the more common complaints of the Leavitt keynote shows up in these comments: "I felt the reporters let him off too lightly." "Disappointing. I didn't feel he answered the questions given and the presentation was not that useful to me."

5. The Science and Politics plenary gained the most praise of any plenary session in my memory. Usually attendees split 50/50 among those who liked it and those who didn't. This year 39 of 54 respondents liked it and only a couple really disliked it. Common replies were: "Excellent plenary. Had lots of drama, good quotable quotes, and a reasonable amount of perspective

and information." "Very informative. Good questions." "Ira Flatow is a great moderator. Discussion was lively."

6. Riverboat Cruise: "No bad juju here!" was the best response. In 2003 Conference Chair Mark Schleifstein finally got SEJers to their feet in New Orleans, and in 2004 Don Hopey had 'em leaping in the air in Pittsburgh before the boat docked. Commenters said: "Brilliant choice for a final night. Best SEJ party yet! Food okay and good drinks and great band and Tina Turner stand in. I didn't see anyone not having a good time." And "How can you criticize great dance music and an open bar?"

By most accounts, this was the best SEJ party ever, even if the food wasn't the best. Still, several did complain about the food and a few complained about the noise, asking for somewhere to escape the band if one isn't into dancing.

7. In spite of some logistical problems, attendees reported that they very much enjoyed the Sunday morning sessions and tours at the National Aviary.

8. The network meals, breakfast breakout sessions and beat dinners remain popular, despite some complaints about events starting too early and or running too late.

9. The hospitality suites, which had mixed praise at best, had some serious logistical problems this year, including that they were too spread out, too hard to find, and were located at the conference center, a bus ride away from the hotels. (The 15th Annual Conference in Austin will not have the hotel difficulties attendees and planners experienced in Pittsburgh.)

10. Beat dinner woes? Despite some transportation and logistical difficulties that left organizers exasperated by the time the buses pulled away, members still love this venue/format. Here's a common response: "Global Climate Change – this was the highlight of the conference. The discussion was terrific and it was fascinating and great fun to meet in a small group and interact with other SEJ members."

11. Mentoring program: Word from the evaluations on our first one-on-one mentoring session is that mentors loved the high energy, while mentees thought that it was too high energy and they didn't get enough time with mentors.

The best-attended concurrent sessions were:

- Tackling Climate Change – 100
- What's in Your Hair? Personal Testing – 75
- Muckraking, Crusading and Objectivity – 70
- Focus on Freelancing – 60
- Emerging Clues to Air Sickness – 55
- When it Rains, Sewage Pours – 55
- Sportsmen and 2004 Election – 50
- Mentoring Program – 50

Some replies are so contrasting that it's hard to believe that people were at the same event. Check these two from the CMU High-Tech solutions mini-tour: "This was fascinating and one of the most informative events, for me. I came away with no less than seven story ideas on this event!" versus "Could probably have been better organized, with more to see."

Jay Letto, SEJ's annual conference manager since 1993, is a founding member of SEJ.



Making a difference, streaming E-news, shaking & moving

By ELIZABETH MCCARTHY

Paul Koberstein, editor and publisher of the Portland, Ore., *Cascadia Times*, won the 2004 Oakes Award for his reporting on the rampant mismanagement of western Pacific fisheries. In "Plundering the Pacific," which ran in Fall 2003, Koberstein examined the conflict-of-interest-ridden, federally appointed committees that oversee the U.S. fisheries, whose shoddy resource management damages the very seas they were created to protect.

The investigative work was held up as "an example of how a small, underfunded, independent publication can make a difference, especially at this time of destructive incursions into the rules and regulations that protect natural resources and the environment," said Joan Konner, chair of the Oakes Award Committee of Judges.

Elsewhere, **Tom Henry** received the Ohio Environmental Council's 2004 award for Excellence in Environmental Journalism. Earlier, he was awarded Ohio's top environmental writing award from the Ohio Society of Professional Journalists.

While many of us have been lamenting the squeezing out of the environmental beat in mainstream media, it's worth taking note that access to green news increased elsewhere. Since early February, the nationally-aired *Enviro Close-Up* with **Karl Grossman** has been webcast on Free Speech TV (www.freespeech.org) and erWeb (www.erweb.org).

"This is a big step forward in getting information out on vital issues to a yet bigger national and now an international audience—information that people are not getting elsewhere on television,"

Grossman said. The first video-streaming launch by Free Speech was "Oil: The Party's Over." It was said to attract the most TV-website visitors on record.

Grossman, professor of journalism at the State University of New York/College at Old Westbury, has hosted *Enviro Close-Up* for 14 years. The program is produced by the nonprofit EnviroVideo and directed by Emmy Award winner Steve Jambeck.

Mike Dunne, reporter for the *Baton Rouge Advocate*, teamed up with photographer **Bevil Knapp** to produce a book on the disappearing coast and culture of Southern Louisiana. "America's

Wetland: Louisiana's Vanishing Coast" is primarily photography by Knapp, with writing by Dunne, who has covered the loss of Louisiana's coast for 20 years.

Dunne and Knapp worked together in the

early 1980s. She asked him to collaborate on the book, which will be published by LSU Press and likely released late this summer. Dunne says the state loses about 25 miles of coastland each year, which "threatens the Gulf of Mexico fisheries, domestic oil and production, shipping and the Mississippi Flyway wildlife habitat."

Published end of last year was **Carol Ann Bassett's** "Organ Pipe, Life on the Edge." The book is about the natural and cultural history of the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument on the Arizona-Mexico border, a remote part of the Sonoran Desert. The region has been a post-9/11 hot spot for Homeland Security. It is "a major route for thousands of immigrants seeking a better life in El Norte, and a dangerous funnel for armed drug smugglers, all of

(Continued next page)

Media on the move

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MOTM... (from page 7)

which has compromised the sensitive ecosystem,” said Bassett, an associate journalism professor at the University of Oregon.

Bassett’s earlier book, “A Gathering of Stones: Journeys to the Edges of a Changing World,” was a finalist for the Oregon Books Award in creative nonfiction.

Dick Russell’s book, “Striper Wars,” which chronicles his and others’ efforts to bring back the striped bass from the brink of extinction and continuing uphill preservation battle, is scheduled for publication at the end of May by Island Press/Shearwater Books.

Former NPR correspondent **David Baron** recently completed a one-year stint teaching science feature writing at Boston University’s Knight Center for Science and Medical Journalism. He has returned to public radio and is now the global development editor for PRI/BBC’s program, “The World.” He oversees coverage of international public health, development and the environment.

Baron hopes to increase coverage of public health and sustainable development. In addition to moving into a management position, he noted that he gets to split his time between Boston and Boulder, Colo. Baron’s year working in academia has assured him that the future of science and environmental journalism is “bright.” But it was quite a challenging job. “I’m used to interviewing Nobel laureates and politicians and celebrities, but facing a roomful of eager students for a 3 hour seminar once a week, that was scary.” He said the graduate students were merciful and he discovered he “actually had a thing or two to teach.”

Prior to the 2003-2004 academic year, he wrote “The Beast in the Garden.” The work, which is about the clash of two- and four-legged beasts in suburbia, just came out in paperback.

After working for 16 years as a technical writer at Hewlett Packard, **Jodi Peterson** became news editor at *High Country News*. Peterson credited the move to her participation at two SEJ conferences. “It was there that I met the contacts and mentors that enabled me to get started in my new career,” she said. “I couldn’t have done it without SEJ and especially Bill Allen, who mentored me.”

Alan Scher Zagier, a reporter for the *Naples (Fla.) Daily News*, is spending the 2004-05 academic year at the University of Missouri at Columbia School of Journalism as a Knight Editing Professional-in-Residence. He teaches introductory reporting and news writing and oversees coverage of health science and the environment at the daily *Columbia Missourian*.

Switching papers and moving from west to east is **Lacey Phillabaum**. She began her new job as a news writer on the *C-ville Weekly*, in Charlotte, Va. in late February. She left her job as editor of *Good Tilth*, a publication about organic farming, and news writer for *Source Weekly*, an alternative, in Bend, Ore.

New SEJ member **Kathie Florsheim** was accepted in to the CASE Media Fellowship at the University of Maine that runs until mid-May. The fellowship, which focuses on fisheries, aquaculture and ocean monitoring, will feed into her documentary project that looks at how the manmade and natural seashore worlds intersect.

Want to spread the word about a career move, new book and/or an award you’ve won? Contact e2mccarthy@cs.com or editorial@californiaenergycircuit.com.

New prize for Western journalism honors James V. Risser

A new environmental journalism award honoring James V. Risser, director emeritus of the Knight Fellowships program at Stanford, has been announced by the Knight Fellowships and the Center for the Study of the North American West.

The James V. Risser Prize for Western Environmental Journalism will be awarded for the first time in 2005, for work done in 2004. It will be open to print, broadcast and online journalists writing about environmental issues in western Canada, Mexico and the United States.

The prize carries an award of \$3,000, and the winner will come to Stanford to participate in a symposium on the issues reported in the winning entry. The deadline for entries was March 15, 2005. Entry forms and award details are available at <http://risserprize.stanford.edu>.

The prize is being established in recognition of Risser’s outstanding journalism career and his leadership of the John S. Knight Fellowships for Professional Journalists from 1985 until his retirement in 2000. Risser is a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner who wrote frequently and incisively about environmental issues, and he has had a particular interest in those issues as they affected the western United States.

Initial Risser Prize funding came from contributions from former Knight Fellows and others associated with the program.

Journalists from the United States, Canada and Mexico are eligible for the prize, said James Bettinger, current director of the Knight Fellowships. But the prize will be given for journalism about a Western environmental issue.

“As such, it will encourage public attention towards the kinds of water, resource, land use and wildlife issues that occur only or primarily in the West,” he said.

Risser was a reporter for the *Des Moines Register* for 20 years, and was its Washington bureau chief from 1976 to 1985. During that time he won numerous journalism honors, including two Pulitzer Prizes for National Reporting. His first Pulitzer, in 1976, was awarded for stories exposing corruption in the U.S. grain exporting industry, which led to criminal convictions and reform legislation. His second Pulitzer, in 1979, was awarded for a series of stories showing the destructive impact of modern American agriculture on the environment.

In 1985, Risser was named director of the Knight Fellowships program, which today brings 12 outstanding mid-career U.S. journalists and up to eight from other countries to study annually at Stanford. More than 700 journalists have studied at Stanford under the program since it began in 1966. Bettinger is director of the program and Dawn E. Garcia is deputy director.

A few hours to scan 25,000 documents? Help is on its way

By LISA STIFFLER

The joy of perusing stacks of documents released in a public records request seems always to be tempered by time constraints and outrageous copying charges. Shake off those chains, reporters. Get your own portable scanner.

For around \$100, you can get a basic sheet-fed scanner. Faster, more versatile models cost around \$250-350. Factors to consider when purchasing a scanner include speed, portability, resolution, file format, and software and system requirements.

It's not as complicated as all that might sound, so stay with me.

When it comes to speed, auto feed scanners are tops, scanning around a dozen pages a minute. Speed is also determined by the resolution of the image being created. For text documents, as compared to photos, 300 dpi is all you need.

File format is how the scanner stores the scanned item, such as PDF files that can be accessed with Adobe Acrobat. Software refers to what program the scanner runs on. For a larger scanner, it should come with its own software and the system requirements likely won't be more than basic Windows operating systems.

Now that we've got the technical stuff out of the way, here's what we did in our newsroom when confronted by the prospect of 25,000 pages of documents and a two-hour window to review them. After hunting around online to familiarize myself with the technology, I cruised to the local Staples store.

Initially, a portable flatbed copier was a strong contender for our duplication dollars – not a scanner. The copier was about \$200, portable and less intimidating for colleagues squeamish with technology. But there were shortcomings. To use the copier, you had to hump your own paper, diminishing portability and increasing the hassle. And the ink was more than \$100 a cartridge. The store only had flatbed copiers, so this thing was going to be laborious and too slow, scanning only a couple of pages a minute.

That's when the Xerox Documate 510 Flatbed Scanner caught my eye. At \$310, it seemed more affordable over time since it doesn't need ink or gobble through paper. I swooned over the auto feed that can be loaded up with 40 pages at once, scanning about a dozen pages a minute and handling double-sided documents. Plus it has a flatbed cover that yawns wide open to fit thick, bound documents. It weighs 11 pounds and is a bit bulky to transport, but a colleague solved this ingeniously by stowing it in roll-away luggage. I was smitten.

The biggest inconvenience associated with scanners is the need to use a laptop to run them, but the benefit of getting your documents in easy-to-store and transfer electronic form completely outweighs that, besides being much more environmentally sound than churning through reams of paper.

The scanner and laptop are simply plugged into an electrical outlet and a USB cable connects the machines together. (Newer laptops have one or more USB ports, a place you plug stuff into; it's identified by a forklike symbol with a longer center prong.) The scanning software was straightforward to install and use. Once you've scanned all the pages in a document, you save the file, which is automatically named with that day's date.

Glitches do come up – the laptop sometimes can't "find" the scanner or a paper jam throws it into a hissy. But turning off the scanner and unplugging the connections, then turning it on and plugging it in again, has always solved both troubles.

Initially I'd been interested in handheld scanners, namely the "DocuPen." Unlike other pens that only scan lines at a time, it's laid on its side and dragged slowly across the paper to capture an entire page. Very portable and ridiculously easy. And after reading online reviews, apparently also overhyped. Unhappy users said the \$200 pen saved fewer than the 100 pages promised before its memory was filled. Batteries, while rechargeable in newer models, were short lived.

One little challenge is transferring the potentially large files from the laptop to another computer. If your newsroom has laptop docking stations, that's the easy fix. Email generally is out since the files are big. I solved the dilemma using a USB drive or jump drive. These fantastic devices are the size of a cigarette lighter and plug right into that USB port previously mentioned. It shows up as an external drive and you just dump your files into it, like you would a floppy or zip disc, then plug it into another computer and transfer them off the USB drive. These things are cool and relatively cheap – \$40-100 for a drive that holds 512 megabytes. (Important note: Tom Cruise's character in "Collateral" used one.)

Researching and buying scanners

Use Google.

I found www.dealtime.com and www.superwarehouse.com useful. Other scanners in the same vein as ours: Visioneer 9450 Flatbed Scanner, Hewlett Packard ScanJet 5550C Flatbed Scanner and the Epson Perfection 1640SU Office Flatbed Scanner.

Online reviews of products can be found at www.epinions.com, www.cnet.com and <http://gizmodo.com/>

For the USB drives try www.newegg.com or www.pcmall.com.

Lisa Stiffler covers the environment for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, where she is now known as the Scanner Queen.



Scanner Styles

Flatbed: Have a glass plate that you place documents on to scan, like a copier.

Automatic Document Feed: Quick, easy to use – stack the pages and run them through.

Path- or Pass-Through: Very portable – about the size of a large hole puncher – but you can only scan loose sheets that are fed singly.

Handheld: Typically work like a highlighter pen, scanning lines of text.

Research News Roundup

Newspaper watchdogs and natural history TV empty of environment

By JAN KNIGHT

California newspaper coverage of conflicts over pesticides and farm workers' health includes diverse voices, challenges status quo, study shows

Reporters provided diverse coverage of conflict over pesticide use and farm workers' health in California's agricultural regions, quoting anti-pesticide sources more often than sources who support use of the chemicals, a new study shows.

The finding is significant, for one reason, because of concerns that U.S. newspapers tend to offer coverage that reflects society's dominant power structures and, in turn, act as "guard dogs" rather than watchdogs of government and industry, according to the study.

The findings also suggest that, based on this study at least, views outside the mainstream are not ignored or marginalized by the news media, as some scholarly research has suggested.

People of color, most of them Hispanic, make up 90 percent of the 2.5 million farm workers in the United States, and farm workers sustain California's \$27 billion agriculture economy, the authors wrote. At the same time, these people face serious health risks because of repeated exposure to pesticides, a situation that can be described as environmental racism.

The researchers analyzed a nonrandom sample of 73 articles appearing between 1994 and 2002 in the *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Santa Rosa Press Democrat* and *Fresno Bee*. They studied the *Times* and *Chronicle* because of their circulation size and diverse readership, while they studied the *Press Democrat* and the *Bee* because they are located in and cover California's largest agricultural regions, including the wine region.

They found that each paper directly and indirectly quoted a variety of sources, including government officials, courts, industry, activists, scientists and politicians. Activists – representatives of environmental or labor organizations advocating alternatives to pesticide use or focusing on unhealthy working conditions – were quoted most often (an average of nearly 40 percent in all papers), the researchers found. Government officials were the second-most quoted (24 percent), followed by industry sources (nearly 23 percent). Scientists, politicians, school officials, clinic nurses, "persons on the street" and court citations were less commonly used as sources.

An analysis of the direct and indirect quotes showed that sources opposed to pesticide use "strongly dominated coverage" (46 percent), while neutral sources comprised 29.1 percent of the quotes and pro-pesticide sources were quoted 25.1 percent of the

time. The researchers took a closer look at quotes from neutral, meaning government-related, sources and found that, while the majority (63 percent) of the quotes could be considered neutral, 35 percent of the quotes reflected a pro-pesticide view and 2 percent an anti-pesticide view.

The researchers concluded that this environmental coverage was an example of the press fulfilling its critical role in democratic society by reporting on the "marketplace of ideas" and "highlighting conflicts within the ruling political economy." In essence, they wrote, "a healthy counter-hegemonic force can be said to be at work."

They added that anti-pesticide views may have received more space because most stories focused on events sparked by anti-pesticide sources. "Reporters were simply responding to anti-pesticide information and allegations, and, as such, it makes sense that somewhat more space would be granted those making the challenge," the researchers wrote. They added that the press views the United Farm Workers Union, unlike some "radical" environmental groups, as a legitimate, established organization, so it might function as a highly credible "counter-hegemonic" source.

For more information, see Elizabeth A. Burch and Joseph C. Harry, "Counter-Hegemony and Environmental Justice in California Newspapers: Source Use Patterns in Stories about Pesticides and Farm Workers" in *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Autumn 2004 (Volume 81, No. 3), pp. 559-577.

Natural history TV: Production changes lead to an image of nature empty of environmental concern, study suggests

Today's natural history TV programs focus on dramatic story lines and entertainment value at the expense of context about species survival, human-wildlife interaction and other environmental concerns, one researcher recently suggested.

Natural history TV has largely shifted from focusing on wildlife in its natural habitat to focus on dramatic storylines and personalities, such as the independently produced "In the Wild" series, which has featured Julia Roberts, Richard Dreyfuss, Holly Hunter, Robin Williams, Goldie Hawn, and Timothy Dalton. The shows also tend to go for dramatic scenes – the "money shots" – often provided by life-and-death struggles among animals and for fear appeals provided by predators such as the Great White shark.

According to the researcher, the shift in focus can be linked to

(Continued on page 12)

Letter to the Editor: Phosphorous vs. phosphorus?

Dear *SEJournal*,

In the spirit of Janet Raloff's "Check with Webster: Toxins are poisons made by organisms" (*SEJournal*, Summer 2004), I would like to find a way to correct an error I frequently see in print. Most recently, the *SEJournal* misused the word ("white phosphorous left on the ground") in the Winter 2004 issue story "Defense Dept. battles for freedom from regulations."

I am a scientist-turned-writer who spent 12 years working

in the Everglades, where a massive water quality restoration project is underway to reduce the amount of phosphorus entering the Everglades, primarily from agricultural runoff. Notice I used the "rus" ending for "phosphorus," which is the noun. The "rous" ending is for the adjective form, such as "phosphorous acid." I see the adjective used as a noun far too often.

Thank you,

Susan Jewell

An Excel primer on using pivot tables (what's that?)

By RUSS CLEMINGS

Spreadsheet programs like Microsoft Excel have lots of tools to help you organize data and find patterns. One of the most versatile is the cross-tab, or what Excel calls a “pivot table.”

With a pivot table, you can quickly compute sums, counts, averages and other characteristics for two or more categories of data at once. This article will show how, using data from the U.S. EPA Toxics Release Inventory. It is aimed at users who are already familiar with Excel basics.

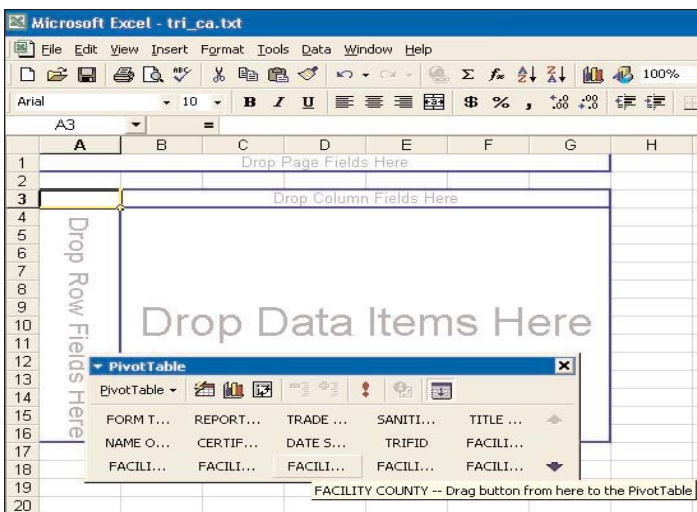
The data used here is for California and can be downloaded at www.sej.org/airdata/tri_ca.txt. Select “File” and “Save” from the menu bar to save the file to your hard drive. The data is in tab-delimited format, but it can be imported into Excel easily by opening the file “tri_ca.txt” (File/Open, then change “Files of type” in the resulting dialog to “text files”) and clicking “Finish” as soon the text import wizard begins.

There are almost 200 columns and 5,000 rows in the resulting spreadsheet, and making sense of them in their raw state is almost impossible. But a pivot table can make things easier. This exercise uses Excel 2000; the steps may differ slightly in other versions. Check the “help” for details.

To start creating a pivot table, define the entire block of data from cell A1 to cell HA4808. Then go to the menu bar at the top of the screen and select “data” followed by “pivot table and pivot chart report.” Click next on steps 1 and 2, then “finish” on step 3. The program then creates a new sheet with a dialog labeled “PivotTable” and some cryptic instructions about where to “drop” various fields.

For this exercise, we’ll keep things simple. The “PivotTable” dialog allows you to scroll through a list of fields to use in your table. Let your mouse hover on the abbreviated versions and the full names should appear. We’re going to summarize fugitive air emissions – chemicals that escape to the air via routes other than a stack – by county.

First, click on the “facility county” field – it should be in the center of the third row – and drag it into the area labeled “drop

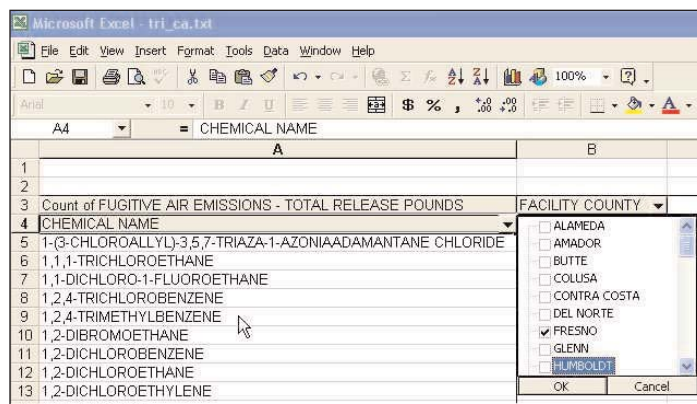


column fields here.” Then, scroll down to the “chemical name” field, which should be in the center of the 10th row, and drag it to the “drop row fields here” region.

We’ve now told the computer to summarize the data by chemical and county, but we have not yet told it where the data – the amount of emissions – is located. So scroll down until you find the field “fugitive air emissions – total release pounds” and drag it over to “drop data items here.”

As soon as you do that, your previously empty pivot table is populated with data. But it’s still huge – more than 200 rows deep and 60 wide, with one column for each county in California. (Well, not really. About a dozen are missing. Is that a story? Maybe.) But let’s say you’re really interested only in six central California counties – Fresno, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced and Tulare. You can hide the rest by clicking on the little down-arrow next to the “facility county” field name and unchecking all of the counties you don’t want.

Now you’ve got a useful starting point to explore the data. Take a look at cell A3. It tells you what the numbers on



your chart represent. If it says “count of fugitive air emissions – total release pounds,” then it’s telling you how many sources released each chemical. If you’d rather know the total amounts of those releases, then right-click on the cell, pick “field settings” from the resulting menu, and click on “sum” in the “summarize by” box. Then click OK.

Experiment with the “field settings” dialog and you’ll see other options. “Average” tells you the average (mean) emissions for all sources of each chemical. “Max” gives you the amount released by the largest single source.

One thing that you might want to do is find the chemical with the largest total emissions in a given county. You can do that by sorting the pivot-table data. First, use the “field settings” dialog to make sure you’re displaying the sum of emissions. Then click anywhere in the data area of the column you want to sort and select “data/sort/descending” on the menu bar (or just click the little icon that has a “z” on top of an “a” next to an arrow). If you clicked in the “Fresno” column, the table should now say that ammonia is the most heavily released chemical, followed by styrene.

Which sources are releasing these chemicals? That question can be answered by double-clicking on the number you’re interested in – the cell, in other words, where the chemical name and county name intersect. For styrene in Fresno County, this should

(Continued next page)

Natural history TV... (from page 10)

changes in program ownership, production techniques, including financing and other elements, all primarily related to competition among producers and distributors for an audience with more channel choices and a desire to be entertained. The researcher quoted an unnamed independent producer/director as saying, "Any proposal that had the word 'environment' or 'conservation' in it was immediately in the bin. What wasn't permitted was to look at a story within a wider context, environmental or ecological." Another unnamed source, a producer/director, told the researcher that "I'm wary about these 'e' words, the 'environment' and 'ecology.' I've been told explicitly that I can't have a strong conservation message."

"This chronic lack of engagement with and representation of the rise of ecological politics can only be seen as politically inexcusable given the rise of [new] environmental . . . social movements and a growing environmental consciousness over recent years," the researcher wrote.

The study offers a brief history of natural history TV production, including commercial and public broadcasting and their natural history units, international satellite and cable TV distributors, co-producers and co-financiers, medium- and small-scale production companies and independent producers. The researcher stated that natural history shows airing worldwide, such as the U.S.-based "Animal Planet," produced by the Discovery Channel, and

National Geographic Television (NGT), influence natural history programming around the globe. Both Discovery and NGT have purchased older wildlife shows produced by other production houses, in part because natural history programs are important to audience ratings and revenues. They offer a timeless "shelf life" and they possess universal, cross-cultural appeal.

The researcher concluded that the tendency to avoid environmental context in nature shows can be linked to two elements. One, natural history programs are expected to be "timeless," so environmental issues of the present day might not translate well in the future. Two, entertainment channels and distributors don't want to alienate audiences by presenting views that they might disagree with or stories of "gloom and doom," which they might turn off.

For more information, see Simon Cottle, "Producing Nature(s): On the Changing Production Ecology of Natural History TV" in *Media, Culture, & Society* 2004 (Volume 26, No. 1, pp. 81-101).

Jan Knight, a former magazine editor and daily newspaper reporter, is an assistant professor of communication at Hawaii Pacific University in Honolulu. She can be reached at jknight@hpu.edu.

Pivot tables... (from page 11)

be cell B6, and the amount listed should be "20174" pounds. Double click there and a new sheet will open with all of the data for the sources – there are two – of that chemical.

Keep in mind here that some pollution sources may not appear in the TRI inventory. For example, by far the largest sources of ammonia in central California are dairy farms, which release ammonia from cattle wastes, and farms that use ammonia for fertilizer. Neither appears here.

A different technique lets you see just selected parts of the hidden data for each chemical. Go back to your pivot table and double-click on the chemical name. A dialog appears that lists all of the available fields.

Let's say you just want the names of the sources for styrene,

and you don't care about the rest of the data. Double-click on the word "styrene" and pick "facility name" from the resulting dialog. Click "OK" and a new column appears with the name of each source for all of the counties in your table. To hide that column and move on, just right-click on the "facility name" label (in cell B4) and select "hide."

This lesson has just scratched the surface of what you can do with pivot tables. For more, see the Excel help topic "About PivotTable reports: interactive data analysis."

Russ Clemings, Bits & Bytes editor, writes, reports and does all sorts of computer tricks for the Fresno Bee.

Q. Which awards inspire reporters to go to exceptional lengths in covering breaking science news?

A. AAAS Science Journalism Awards.

The AAAS Science Journalism Awards represent the pinnacle of achievement for professional journalists in the science writing field. The awards recognize outstanding reporting for a general audience and honor individuals (rather than institutions, publishers or employers) for their coverage of the sciences, engineering and mathematics. The awards are sponsored by Johnson & Johnson Pharmaceutical Research & Development, L.L.C.

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E.U.'s environmental agenda offers lessons for U.S. future

By **PAUL D. THACKER**

The United States has the economic might and military omnipotence, but Europe is fast positioning itself as the world's top political superpower. With 450 million people, the E.U.'s population outranks America's, and the total GDP of its twenty-five countries is also slightly larger.

One area where Europe has definitely eclipsed our country is in environmental science and regulation. In fact, if you want to know which pollutant might soon become a concern to the EPA, or if a pharmaceutical in our rivers and streams is possibly toxic, don't bother dialing a number with a 202 area code. Call Brussels. The Europeans are five years ahead of the U.S. in understanding environmental problems, and the E.U. is now setting the environmental agenda for the planet.

The most dramatic attempt to alter environmental regulations and public health is REACH – Regulations, Evaluation, and Authorization of Chemicals. The policy will require registration of all chemicals that are produced or imported into the E.U. when quantities of the chemical are greater than one ton. The amount of safety data required for registration will be proportional to the chemical's health risks and production volumes. While this is an E.U. regulation, U.S. companies will be affected because so many of them are multinationals either located or invested in Europe. Plus, many U.S. officials and environmental groups are looking at REACH as a possible blueprint for state legislation here in the United States.

Under REACH, companies must also seek authorization for problematic chemicals such as carcinogens, mutagens and substances toxic to reproduction. These are those nasty chemicals constantly in the news such as asbestos. Toxic chemicals that persist in the environment or that bioaccumulate (think of DDT or all those chemicals that keep popping up in Arctic animals) will also need authorization.

So what does any of this mean? First you have to understand that even the experts at EPA complain that they don't have enough safety data on the over 30,000 chemicals used to maintain our modern lifestyle. In comparison, we know a great deal more about pharmaceuticals and pesticides. Current EPA regulations require companies to submit more risk assessment information on chemicals than in the past, but over

99 percent of the chemicals on the market were grandfathered in when this legislation was passed.

The Bush administration has been working in tandem with industry for years to weaken REACH, as revealed in April 2004 from federal documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by the Environmental Health Fund and passed off to Rep. Henry Waxman's office. The Waxman report contains a document from the Department of Commerce which noted that chemical manufacturing is Europe's third largest industry, accounting for 29 percent of world chemical production. The U.S. accounts for 31 percent of world chemical production but is a net importer of European chemicals. Oddly enough, this same report agrees that the current system in Europe "simply does not work. It is inefficient, administratively burdensome and costly to Member States...among other things."

The Waxman report also details incidents where the Bush administration has ignored environmental and public health officials regarding their support of REACH.

"The United States has not conducted studies on the health and environmental impacts of REACH," Waxman says. "It [simply] began to lobby against REACH on behalf of U.S. industry interests without a full understanding of these impacts." The E.U.'s own analysis of REACH projected a saving of 50 billion euros in health-care costs to Europeans.

When asked to comment on the savings to U.S. industry from lower health care costs because of REACH, Michael Walls director of Science Policy with the American Chemistry Council (ACC) said, "It raises broad social issues that we are just not prepared to answer."

The lobbying on behalf of industry reached all the way up the political food chain to include a cable from Secretary of State Colin Powell in April 2003 to diplomatic posts in Europe. The cable provided a list of talking points for American government officials to use when speaking with their European counterparts. The arguments were notably similar in language to themes developed by industry at the request of a U.S. trade official.

Addressing chemical representatives at Pittsburgh Chemical Day a few months after the Waxman report, the president of the American Chemistry Council praised Waxman for noting the ACC's "undue influ-

(Continued next page)

Contacts

Robert Donkers

Counselor, Transportation, Energy, Environment
European Union
202-862-9577
Robert.donkers@cec.eu.int

Chris VandenHeuvel

Communications Director, American Chemistry Council
703-741-5587
Chris_VandenHeuvel@americanchemistry.com
Americanchemistry.com

Anna Laitin

Committee on Government Reform
Rep. Henry A. Waxman, Ranking Democrat
U.S. House of Representatives
202-225-5051

Daryl W. Ditz, Ph.D.

Center for International Environmental Law
Washington, DC 20036
202-785-8702
daryl@ready4reach.com

Michael P. Wilson, Ph.D., MPH

Assistant Research Scientist
Center for Occupational and Environmental Health, UC Berkeley
510-642-5703

Joseph DiGangi, Ph.D.

Environmental Health Fund
digangi@environmentalhealthfund.org
312-566-0985

E.U... (from page 13)

ence” on the United States government. He added, “But the Congressman is going to be disappointed because ‘chemistry means business.’”

And at an industry conference I attended in November, Penelope Naas, the director of the Office of European Union for the U.S. Department of Commerce, seemed to deny that she had been helping industry to kill European legislation. “The press likes to publicize this as the U.S. attacking the E.U.,” she told the attendees.

But when I asked about the Waxman report, her jaw tightened. Afterward, as we were getting coffee, she mentioned that I should let more of her “appropriators” (Washington-speak for “senators and congressmen”) know about the Waxman report because Commerce had been criticized by congressional leaders for not doing enough to defeat REACH. To my surprise, she also added that by requesting government documents about REACH, the Environmental Health Fund was endangering the government archives for future historians. “I now work in a paperless office,” she told me.

Numerous conference attendees pointed out that it was impossible to find a difference between the position of U.S. government on REACH and the position espoused by industry groups. Interestingly, when Penelope Naas left the hotel, she caught a cab with Michael Walls of the ACC.

Robert Donkers, the Environmental Counselor to European Union’s delegation to the United States, is credited as the author of REACH. He says the policy will increase the public’s confidence in consumer products which has suffered a series of scandals including mad cow disease and the discovery of dioxin in chickens.

“Once you go through the REACH process, you have chemicals that have a blessing, and you create better markets,” he said.

All the information gathered under REACH will be put into a central database that can be publicly accessed, and the whole initiative will probably be handled by a soon-to-be created government entity under the E.U.. Detractors say the process is unwieldy and creates barriers to trade. The U.S. does \$600 billion in trade across the Atlantic every year and has \$2.5 trillion invested in Europe.

The direct costs of REACH are projected at around 3.5 to 4 billion euros over 11 years, with most costs coming from the need for safety testing and registration. Annually, this comes to around 315 million euros or 0.06 percent of annual chemical sales, according to a study done by the European Council.

“This is not a crippling blow to industry,” says Frank Ackerman, an environmental economist at Tufts whose own study on the costs of REACH confirmed these numbers.

But Michael Walls says that trade will be severely curtailed. “We are a customer of Europe. If products are removed because of REACH, we will be affected.”

A big problem with REACH concerns the amount of information that will have to pass down the supply chain. For instance, workers in a textile mill will have a different exposure scenario to a detergent than auto workers who might use the same chemical.

This will require the retailer to develop different risk assessment documents if they want to sell a chemical. While this will mean better safety for workers, generating the information could be burdensome and some sellers may opt to not sell a chemical to niche markets.

“Users will buy based upon the information available,” said Andreas Ahrens, a co-founder of the German consultant company Okopol, Institute for Environmental Strategies. “And companies will have markets based upon whether they choose to develop that information to service certain markets.”

REACH will have the biggest impact on small companies with fewer than 250 workers. It could open up markets to smaller companies that find it profitable to service niche markets with the safety information required under REACH. And as chemicals are banned, small companies are more likely to respond with innovative products that are safer.

“At least in Europe, the innovation is coming from the small to mid-size companies,” said Robert Foster, a senior science advisor to Notox, a company that tests chemicals for safety.

The most interesting wrinkle in the debate over REACH is now occurring in California. The state assembly tasked UC Berkeley with developing a modern chemical policy for California. Michael Wilson, an assistant research scientist at the Center for Occupational and Environmental Health in Berkeley said the report is still being developed but has many elements in common with REACH. He said the report should be released this year and that state lawmakers are considering introducing some of the report’s language into 2005 legislation. He added that chemical industry representatives contacted him and state lawmakers shortly after the report was assigned.

“Like Europe, we need to overhaul our chemical policy,” said a science adviser in the California legislature, who asked to remain anonymous. The adviser added that chemical trade groups are “nervous about what we’re up to,” but that many companies would like to see better chemical policy along the lines of REACH, so that they can quickly remove bad chemicals from the market and protect themselves from lawsuits.

The E.U. had its first hearing on REACH this year and EPA representatives have been in Brussels not to lobby but to “share experience.” The policy is expected to be enacted in 2006, but Europeans say they don’t expect anything to be passed until 2007 at the earliest.

If you plan on reporting on REACH, bone up on the facts and grab a big bottle of Dramamine before you begin placing calls. This is the biggest potential change to the chemical industry in any of our lifetimes. People who are involved have been working on this for years, finely tuning their talking points, and will have little problem spinning a neophyte.

Paul D. Thacker is an associate editor at Environmental Science & Technology in Washington, D.C.

Waxman report online:

<http://www.democrats.reform.house.gov/investigations.asp?Issue=Chemical+Regulation>

Using databases for environmental history research

By BILL KOVARIK

You never start a story without research. It's standard practice.

In the newsroom, you always check the library ("the morgue") and look up the old clips about the subject you are working on.

Until recently, journalism students couldn't do the initial research at a newspaper — these private libraries were not usually open to students.

Research in a standard library would usually involve a two-step process: first, a check in the printed index, such as the shelf full of indices for *The New York Times*; and then a tedious run through miles of microfilm or microfiche.

In the past decade or so, as Lexis-Nexis became more affordable for universities, it was easier to look up recent articles. But a full history was still a long, tedious slog through indices and microfilm.

Recently, a new kind of online database became available. In July of 2002, ProQuest (formerly Bell & Howell) began offering the entire *New York Times* backfile from 1851 to 1999. The backfile has three million pages and over 25 million articles covering 148 years of history. In 2003, ProQuest added *The Washington Post*. Other papers including *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Times* are also available.

A search using Boolean delimiters and dates returns a list of possible articles, just like any other database, but the full text is returned as a pdf file. The page position is also available as a lower-resolution pdf. Although it is not full cut-and-paste text, the value to researchers is that pages look as they did when they were printed and it is difficult to have omissions or changes to the material.

These databases are also an improvement in that they are significantly more comprehensive than the old printed indices. For instance, a search for air pollution and smoke nuisance articles through the Progressive era in *The New York Times* showed many more hits from the ProQuest database than articles referenced in the *Times* original printed index. (Chart 1)

In order to teach students how to use these databases, and also as an experimental teaching assignment, I asked members of a class of media history students to help me find articles for an *SEJournal* column concerning environmental coverage 10, 25, 50, 75, 100 and 150 years ago. "Help your professor make his deadline for the *SEJournal*" was the name of the assignment.

All of the items in the historical sidebar below are from these student efforts.

The experiment was OK but not entirely successful. About half the students attempted to complete the extra credit assignment, and

of these, only about two thirds were able to follow instructions and return four or more pdf files through email with a summary.

Part of the problem was conceptual: Most students did not believe there was any news coverage of environmental issues earlier than the 1970s, and the assignment was a challenge.

Part of the problem was semantic. Although students were instructed to use alternative search terms (sometimes specific ones), much of what is now considered "environmental" fell into different categories in years past, and some students

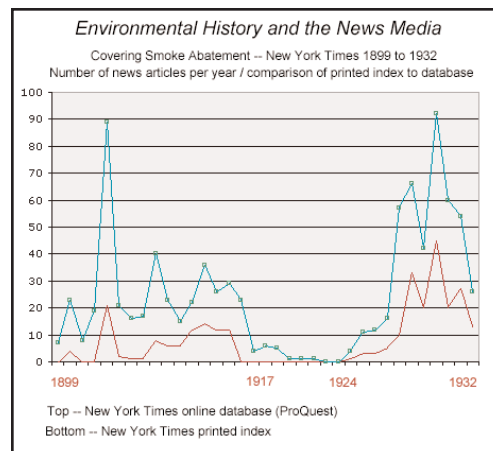
gave up in frustration. One student, for example, could not find any information about endangered species in the 1900s to 1920s, but she did find one article on buffalo extinction, which she offered very tentatively as possibly not meeting the requirements.

Students said finding articles and text on the environment in earlier years was difficult. "I would assume that much of this is due in part to the lack of concern for things such as forest conservation until more recent years," said one. Assume, of course, is the operative word here, because there are literally thousands of articles on forest conservation in the ProQuest papers from the 1880s through the 1950s.

This opens a discussion about seeing and believing. Does believing help us see, and does not believing keep us from seeing?

While students are familiar with the idea of a theory growing out of observation, it is also true that theories can inform our research and lead to more observations.

A link might also be made between scientific research and historical research in that both often depend on the interplay of deductive and inductive approaches in order to find the truth.



Bill Kovarik is a professor in the Department of Media Studies at Radford University and an *SEJ* board member.

Anniversaries in environmental history

TEN YEARS AGO: The Nigerian government executes journalist and environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other environmentalists. They had been active in fighting pollution from Shell Oil Co. in the Ogani homeland. International protests of Shell activities continue. Saro-Wiwa's last words: "Lord, take my soul, but the struggle continues."

TWENTY FIVE YEARS AGO: Water shortages and pollution will be as big a problem in the 1980s as energy was in the 1970s, according to the Council on Environmental Quality. (*Washington Post*, Feb. 20, 1980).

FIFTY YEARS AGO: Although few may realize it, earth's birds are becoming more endangered every day, Audubon president Irston Barnes writes in his column, "The Naturalist."

SEVENTY FIVE YEARS AGO: On Feb. 3 *The Washington Post* reports that industries want to start logging Yellowstone. "Private Interests Trying to Grab Off Yellowstone Park."

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO: Congress adopts several new policies to protect forestlands after calls for legislative action. The new policies "Aim to Save Forests" by protecting against logging and fire-burning, *The Washington Post* says. As part of the plan, the Bureau of Forestry becomes the U.S. Forest Service.

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AGO: New York is safer than ever from yellow fever, the *New York Times* says, because pools of stagnant water, unfit drinking water and other problems dating back to the last century have been cleaned up.

Houston air... (from page 1)

and average concentrations of each chemical in every monitored area. Median concentrations for chemicals were also calculated in each location by clusters of homes where several monitors were located to get a better idea of possible sources. The *Chronicle* looked at differences between the clusters, the possible sources in the area, and the wind data to infer where the pollution detected was coming from.

When possible, the *Chronicle* used federal emissions data and the state's emissions inventory to determine the sources of various chemicals from nearby industries, which were selected by reviewing industrial maps and querying a federal emissions database by ZIP code.

The newspaper then compared the results to the Texas Effects Screen Level, which predicts at what point health impacts might occur. It also looked at action levels from other states, including neighboring Louisiana as well as New Jersey, Vermont and North Carolina.

The *Chronicle* also sent the data for independent analysis to six experts, and analyzed 12 years of state air-toxic-monitoring data.

The result was a sweeping series that, for the first time, showed what toxic chemicals that people living near petrochemical plants in the Houston area are breathing.

Cappiello's stories are full of great vignettes. Like this:

"Those who measure pollution for a living know to avoid Deer Park's Tidal Road.

"The air is so contaminated on one stretch of this industry-lined street along the Houston Ship Channel that state personnel will no longer occupy a monitoring van when it is parked there. On a recent night, an empty swivel chair sat between rows of computers and machines analyzing the air outside.

"It's either wear a respirator or leave it unmanned," explained Tim Doty, leader of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's mobile monitoring team, citing the nau-

sea, headaches and sore throats his staff has reported on previous trips there. "We've been here several times, and there has been a history of health effects along this roadway."

Inside Story takes a look at how Cappiello did the series.

Q. How did the story idea come about? If it was your idea, how did you sell the editors?

A. I knew I was going to do something about air pollution a few months into covering the environment beat at the *Chronicle*. But it took me awhile to figure out what it was. Then, as I began covering more and more stories dealing with pollution events in communities, I came across something that just didn't make sense. Residents would tell these horror stories about living next to the industrial plants, but when you called the state or the companies to get information about what was in the air the response was "our monitors detected nothing" or "everything is fine."

I even had one company say that they were burning off the chemicals, while on television I could see the black smoke – a tell-tale sign of incomplete combustion. The idea for the project was mine. And the pitch to my editors was pretty simple – I just said that for decades these people who live next to plants have not been told what is in their air and whether it is harmful – we

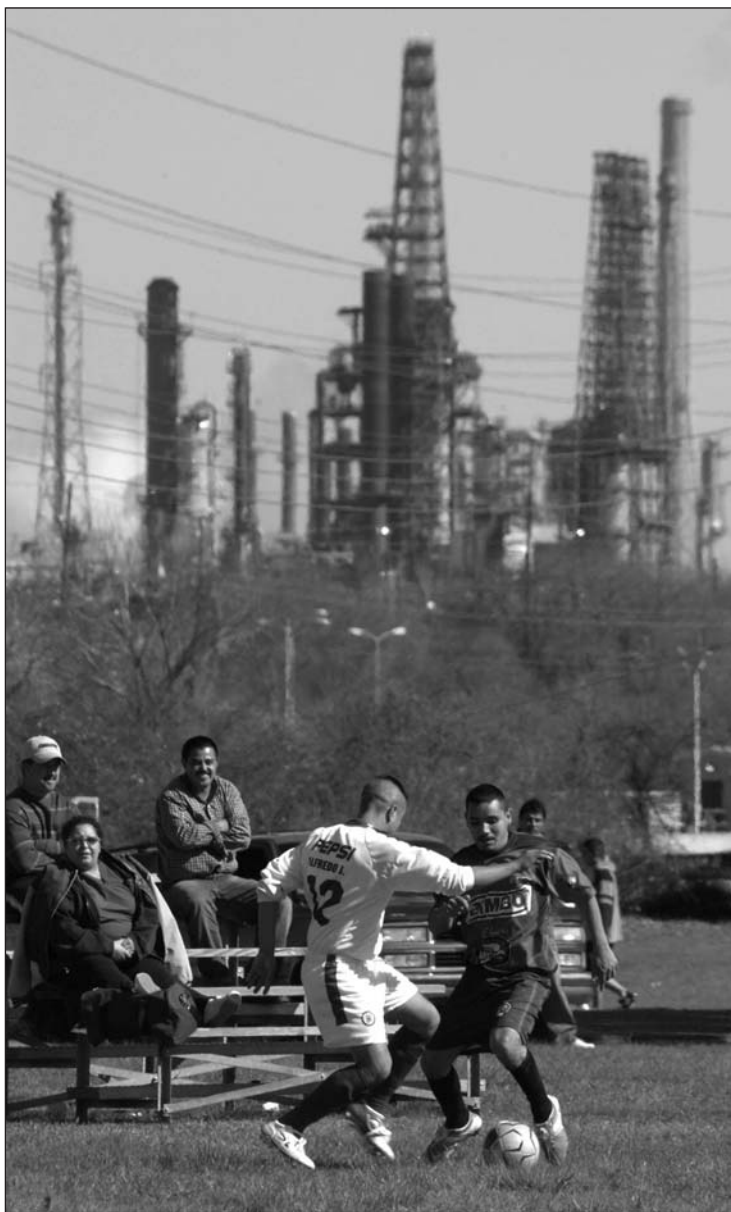
can tell them. They didn't even balk at the price, although the investment made me nervous.

Q. I think one of the things that set this apart from many other similar series is that the newspaper itself conducted some testing on its own. How did that idea come to reality? Did it cost a lot for each of the samples? Was there much hesitation to use volunteers in surrounding communities?

A. I strongly felt that we needed hard data to get the state's and the industry's attention. Without data, what was really going

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Photo courtesy of the Houston Chronicle



Soccer teams play on the weekends in Milby Park, which is near Texas Petrochemicals. A state report found pollutant levels detected here in 2003 were high enough to increase the risk of contracting cancer.

on would get lost in the anecdotal, as it had for years. The monitors, with analysis, cost about \$125 a piece. We put up 100, so you can do the math. In the beginning, I struggled with finding a way to measure air pollution that was affordable. Once I found the technology, I started talking methodology with a lot of different people, including experts from industry, the regulatory community and environmental community.

My background in science also helped. In order to get my masters in environmental science I had to do a research project, so I knew how to set up a study that would answer the questions we had, which were: What pollutants are in neighborhoods near Houston's industry? And are the quantities enough to put people at risk?

There was no hesitation to use the volunteers. None of them were paid. None were anonymous. All were trained on how to open the monitor. And we really wanted to make this very personal, so the data and the numbers could be infused with personal stories. Also, logistically, it would have been very difficult to get up all the monitors near plants (where much of the property is privately owned) without residents' help. The downside, however, was that the majority of the volunteers were predisposed to believing that there was something bad in their air.

Q. What were the biggest challenges in doing your own testing? If you could do it over again, is there anything you'd change?

A. The biggest challenge, by far, was recruiting, training and coordinating 84 different people. I can't tell you how many times we had to call for headshots, how many times we had to check in with them to make sure they were aware of the time the monitor would be going up, etc. As for what I would change, there are always improvements that can be made in methodology. Ideally, I would have liked to measure pollution four separate times in these locations over the course of a year and take the average, and then compare that to health-based guidelines. But obviously, that would have cost three times more money.

Q. What chemicals were you trying to identify and why?

A. The focus of the project solely was on air toxics – the group of 188 compounds the EPA identified in 1990 as being hazardous to human health. We were interested in these because the counties of Harris, Jefferson and Brazoria in Texas are home to some of the biggest releasers of air toxics in the United States.

According to the latest Toxics Release Inventory, Harris County, home to Houston, ranks number one in benzene and butadiene releases.

Q. What sources did you use to define the compounds that testing found and that you wrote about? Was there a particular reference book or website you used to get health impact information?

A. We used a whole list of sources to learn about the chemicals and the guidelines used to protect people in communities. They included: ATSDR, EPA's IRIS, and interviews with officials in numerous other states about their guidelines including Louisiana, North Carolina, Massachusetts, New Jersey and California.

Q. Much of the story related to fence line communities and buyouts. How did you find folks in affected communities that talked? You also had great information on how much some companies spent on buyouts. Did that information come from something you dug up or from the companies?

A. We found people by going door to door. It wasn't easy. Many people who

live in these areas have connections to the plants operating beside them, and in the case of Manchester, there was a language barrier since the majority of the community speaks only Spanish. When I couldn't possibly knock on more doors, I contacted local civic club presidents and local council members for help. As for the buyout information, *Chronicle* reporter Dan Feldstein and I got much of it through the local appraisal districts and through interviews with the companies. A local lawyer leaked us documents showing that the companies were concerned with liabilities and complaints, and thus wanted people moved out.

Q. "Fugitive emissions," or leaks and accidental releases,

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The stacks of Huntsman's chemical plant rise behind a city park in Port Neches, Texas.

Photo courtesy of the Houston Chronicle

Houston air... (from page 17)

often add up to more than the total stack emissions, but at the same time are not included in TRI numbers. Why did you feel it important to talk about “fugitive emissions?”

A. I felt it was important to talk about fugitive emissions for a number of reasons. The first was to show readers that monitor-

and write all the stories. The editors suggested working with Dan Feldstein, one of our project reporters, on the buyout story because of his expertise in public records. I recruited Leigh Hopper, our medical reporter, to work on the project because I admired and respected her work. And Lise Olsen is just amazing at computer-assisted analysis, so she offered her help early on.

Q. I noticed that right before your series ran, one government agency apparently released a report on air toxics. Do you think they were trying to pre-empt your story?

A. I definitely think they were trying to pre-empt the story. No other health effects review of state data had looked like this before, and the state was well aware we had calculated cancer risk based on our data. It was unfortunate it came out before our project was published, but it was just further support for what we found.

Q. One thing I really liked, at least in the web version, was that you actually printed the whole e-mail from company spokespersons

regarding the findings of the newspaper’s testing. How did you use that in the print version? Is printing the whole response something that the Web version can do that print just can’t?

A. Due to space considerations (the first day of the project was a 12-page special section), printing the entire response from the companies was not really an option. We decided to put them on the Web when we noticed how similar their responses to our study were. We thought the public would be interested in seeing that for themselves.

Q. What kind of reaction did you get from readers? Government officials?

A. I’m still digging out from the deluge of responses. We got nearly 100 calls on the hotline that was active during the series, and hundreds of e-mails. Houston Mayor Bill White has said he plans to install monitors on the fence-lines of facilities, bring civil action against companies found breaking air pollution laws, and he has called on the state and federal governments to post their data on the Internet.

In early February, two public meetings were planned. One was a town hall meeting held by local representatives. The other was a public hearing before the City Council. There also have been rumblings about possible legislation and on the federal

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Photo courtesy of the Houston Chronicle



One of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's monitoring vans sits empty. In the past, state personnel who had worked in this spot reported sore throats and nausea. Now they leave the van unoccupied most of the time.

ing and controlling pollution at these plants is not easy. The second reason was to inform – many people living near these things don’t even think about leaks. They are more focused on what they see, such as flares and steam. And lastly, fugitive emissions, by nature of being released close to the ground, can have a greater impact on the concentrations of chemicals found in fence-line communities.

Q. As you went along, you had loads of material gathered, dozens of interviews. How did you manage it all? Did you use an outline? If so, how often did it change?

A. The amount of information I collected was immense. But as with previous projects that I have worked on, I tackled it like I was reporting a whole bunch of stories at once. At the end, as I was beginning to write, I just emptied my notebooks into different files, each one for a particular story. One would be slugged, “Manchester vignette,” another “Fugitives.” Miscellaneous information or notes went into a separate file. The budget really didn’t change much from the beginning, so I was lucky.

Q. There were other reporters also writing for this project. How did they get pulled into the story and why?

A. Well, first of all, there came a point where I said to myself, “You can’t do it all.” Initially, the editors wanted the project to run by the end of 2004, and with that deadline I couldn’t report

Carmody... (from page 5)

ates watched with concern as Kevin took on mob-connected Detroit businessmen in the 1998 *Southtown* series, "Public Lands/Private Agendas," a series that exposed the plans of developers to build a landfill next to the nation's first prairie park and its most expensive veterans' cemetery.

Statesman editor Richard Oppel said in his newspaper's March 11 obituary, "As in the case of his investigation of pollutants in Barton Springs, his reporting could bring politicians, pseudo-scientists and special interests to rage – and to press conferences and demonstrations. But, ultimately, he brought them to action."

"Kevin's work, in Chicago, Austin and elsewhere, is his most visible legacy," said Dan Fagin, SEJ board member and past president. "And it is extraordinary by any measure. His project stories represented the highest aspirations of a profession that so often, and increasingly, settles for far less."

Kevin brought the same tenacity to SEJ, working tirelessly to keep the fledgling organization on track as board secretary in the early years, honing board election policies, tracking board decisions, adding his level-headed thinking to the extraordinary mix of journalists who founded SEJ. In the days immediately following his death, the same phrases were spoken again and again: Kevin's ability to analyze a situation, Kevin's clear-headedness, Kevin's comprehensive grasp of complex situations, Kevin's ability to think things through and come up with the right answer.

Throughout his career, Kevin's dedication worked to further SEJ's mission to improve the quality, accuracy and visibility of environmental reporting. His efforts helped boost the environment beat into the public eye and helped create a public demand for this kind of reporting. And his warmth, personable style and enthusiasm helped build the ranks of journalists who cover environment.

That warmth spilled over into how he relaxed, too, and his favorite way to relax was to go fishing. Board meetings, always

held in different cities across the country, gave the opportunity to test the waters of many different states. Kevin could find water with fish anywhere. He often took others with him, lent rods and tackle as needed and headed off to rivers, streams and lakes in states too numerous to mention.

"Kevin pushed the fishing time we had right up to the limit," recalls Jim Bruggers, board member and former president. "After a board meeting in Portland, Ore., we were trying to hook Columbia River salmon in a tributary the morning before our

planes were scheduled to depart. I had to drive (let's just say pretty fast) to get to the Portland airport to make my plane."

I recall a similar mad dash to the Pittsburgh airport after fishing for trout in Pennsylvania's Youghogheny River and Dunbar Creek with Kevin, Jim and board member Don Hopley.

If Kevin stayed fishing late, he also started early, no matter what. Following a board meeting in St. Paul, Minn., in July 2002, Jim Bruggers, Kevin and I managed, after some great music and a nightcap in the hotel scotch bar, to get back to our rooms at 3 a.m. Two hours later we met in the lobby and went out into the rain with our gear, heading for a mini-mart to buy our fishing licenses.

Watching Kevin on the water, I understood why he was such a great journalist. He could read water and knew how the fish would respond. He had long studied them and honed his craft over the years. His touch on the line was light and beautiful – never forced, never erratic, waiting with absolute patience for the shudder on the line indicating the instant for precise action – just like he did with his reporting.

Kevin is survived by his wife, Pat Dockery, a former SEJ member, and their daughter, Siobhan. Our hearts are with them in grief.

Chris Rigel is associate director of SEJ and has been with the organization for 12 years.



Houston air... (from page 18)

level, pressure on the EPA.

Q. If you were going to advise anyone how to do this story, what would you tell them are the key things they need to know?

A. You need to do a lot of work and a lot of research beforehand to see whether a do-it-yourself test is feasible, before pitching it to your editors. Contact the best people in the field and have them assist you. When your editors are rushing you to make a deadline, as mine did initially in this project, don't rush the analysis. That is the basis for your stories. Baby-sit each and every aspect of the project because of the technical subject matter. And last but not least, get a lot of sleep.

Cappiello is the environment writer for the Houston Chronicle, where she has covered environmental issues since 2002. Prior to working at the paper, Cappiello wrote about the environment for Albany Times Union in upstate New York, where she covered the controversial decision to dredge the Hudson River of PCBs. Cappiello earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Georgetown University and is a graduate of Columbia University's dual master's program in Earth & Environmental Science Journalism. She has been a member of SEJ since 1997, and this year will co-chair the annual conference in Austin.

FOIA... (from page 1)

who have presented advice at journalism conferences, including the Investigative Reporters & Editors national conference.

- Try to avoid filing a FOIA by obtaining the documents or data informally from the appropriate source. If they say you'll need to file a FOIA, then say, "No problem." Who do I send it to? What document do I need to ask for?"

- Be familiar with the local, state and federal information

laws, paying close attention to what is exempted and the procedures for filing and responding to a records request. For example, how many days does a public agency have to respond to your request. Under my state law, they must respond in three days, but that doesn't mean they have to turn over anything that quickly. The Reporters Committee's website contains the text of all state public

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Recent government actions close off more information

By JOE DAVIS

A movement to cut off public information on some environmental issues actually was under way well before the year 2000. Congress in 1999 drastically restricted public access to information about toxic chemical hazards (under so-called "Risk Management Plans") that only a decade earlier it had required EPA to publicize widely.

Nonetheless, since the beginning of the Bush administration, and especially since the 9/11 attacks, area after area of once-public environmental information has been made secret by law or regulation. Here are some examples, with references to *WatchDog Tipsheets*, found on the web at www.sej.org/foia/index8.htm, and other sources:

- The Salt Institute is trying to get the government to suppress a study by the National Institutes of Health which found that reducing dietary salt helped lower people's blood pressure. How? By using an obscure new mechanism engineered by the Office of Management and Budget (and lobbyists who used to work for OMB) called the "Data Quality Act." Critics say this network of rules is a way of keeping the public in the dark about environmental health threats. (*WatchDog* of Feb. 11, 2005).

- Some 50 U.S. mayors wrote the Department of Homeland Security Jan. 18 pleading for more information about hazardous material rail shipments going through their cities. They had been asking for such information since just after the 9/11 attacks but had not received it. Their concern was fueled by the January spill of a chlorine tank car in South Carolina which killed nine people. The South Carolina accident happened in a rural area – and the toll could have been hundreds of times higher in a densely populated urban area. DHS recently proposed removing from railcars the hazmat placards that may save lives of first responders and public. (*WatchDog* of Jan. 26, 2005)

- Starting in 2002, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission moved to remove from the public record certain information about dams, powerplants, transmission lines, pipelines, etc. which it thought could be useful to terrorists. Such "Critical Energy Infrastructure Information" (CEII) turned out to include environmental and safety studies on dangerous facilities which had been proposed before FERC for licensing – e.g. liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals – some in densely populated areas. When the quasi-journalistic Center for Public Integrity started investigating illegal "ex parte" back-room meetings between FERC Chairman Pat Wood and major energy companies pushing to build LNG terminals, they were

told that information was secret, too. Now CPI is suing FERC to get access to information that could reveal corruption. (*WatchDog* of Dec. 15, 2004)

- Since taking office in 2001, the Bush administration has moved on a number of fronts to remove from public view scientific and academic studies on climate change which did not support the administration's anti-Kyoto policy. Most notorious among these was the "National Assessment" of climate change impacts. Conservative groups used Data Quality Act complaints to try to get the White House to un-publish it. While it remains online, all links to it from the homepage of the Global Change Research Program were removed, so the public literally "can't get there from here." When an alarming international report about climate change impacts on the Arctic was finished, the administration insisted that it not be published until after the 2004 election. (*WatchDogs* of Nov. 17, 2004 and Sept. 4, 2003)

- In the fall of 2004, it was discovered that the aerospace industry had buried in the 2005 Defense Authorization bill a provision carrying a new FOIA exemption for a broad swath of remote land sensing data – including perhaps the kind of Landsat imagery that had fueled and verified concern over man's impact on the planet earth for over a generation. While the bill cited "security" as a concern, the real motive turned out to be profit for aerospace companies. When SEJ and other journalism groups protested to congressional committees, the bill was rewritten to leave much of the most crucial environmental information in the public domain. (*WatchDog* of Sept. 23, 2004)

- On Oct. 12, 2001, only a month after the 9/11 attacks, then-Attorney General John Ashcroft issued what came to be called the "Ashcroft memo" re-interpreting the Freedom of Information Act. Under the previous administration, federal FOIA policy (set by the Justice Department) was essentially to release any information unless there were substantive legal arguments for withholding it. The Ashcroft Memo reversed that – telling federal bureaucrats responsible for carrying out FOIA, in essence, not to disclose information if they could find any legal arguments for withholding it – and that the Justice Department would go to court to back them up. (Ashcroft memo: www.usdoj.gov/oip/foiapost/2001foiapost19.htm)

Joe Davis edits SEJ's WatchDog Tipsheet.

FOIA... (from page 20)

records laws at www.rcfp.org/cgi-local/tapping/index.cgi?function=browse. The DOJ website contains the text of the federal FOIA, and maintains a running update of federal FOIA litigation.

- When you interview sources, think FOIA. What document do I need to ask for? Or, how do you communicate with your staff? For years, one of the most valuable documents I regularly obtained was a monthly activity report in which every EPA division manager reported on their activities to the regional director.

- Check out the FOIA reading rooms. Most federal agencies have one. There they often post the most-requested documents or list records that others, including reporters, have requested. Lots of FOIAs related to a particular hazardous waste site, for example, may be a clue that much is happening or about to happen there. Also, consider requesting the list of all FOIAs or, even better, get to know the FOIA officer well enough that you can visit and see the list of what has been requested.

- Think multiple FOIAs. If a waste site is under the jurisdiction of both state and federal regulators, FOIA both agencies. Often, I found, state officials redacted less than the federal agencies. Names, key sources and actions may be contained in one set of files but redacted in another.

- Ask for a fee waiver when you make the records request. Most laws provide for a waiver of fees if the information's release would be in the public's interest. (See sample letter to EPA for what qualifies for a fee waiver). Borenstein said requesting the fee waiver up front might save you weeks of time.

- But copying fees probably will still be charged. So consider requesting to review the records before any copies are made. If you find that there's a large number of documents you will need to copy, consider buying a portable copy machine or a scanner. (See Reporter's Toolbox, page 9)

- Be sure to follow up on requests. Don't let them wait you out; otherwise, the law will mean little. And be active with press organizations, including SEJ, in assuring that local, state and federal agencies adhere to the laws and refrain from weakening them.

- Seek help from colleagues. For example, someone may have already obtained the document or may be having similar problems obtaining records from an agency. There is power in numbers.

- MOST IMPORTANT: Use this option or the future may mean you won't have it. Also, it'll make your work stand out.

You can also get much good further advice, boilerplate, wisdom, and experience from the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. Their guidebook, "How to Use the Federal FOI Act," is available online. See especially the two chapters on fee waivers, "You may ask for a fee waiver" and "You may have to pay fees." For further advice, contact RCFP's Rebecca Daugherty (or anyone else) at (800) 336-4243 or (703) 807-2100, or email at rcfp@rcfp.org.

Also, check out recent studies by media organizations on the response of public agencies in your state to records requests, as well as numerous state audits that have looked at compliance with state law governing open meetings and records. Several state audits have been completed in recent years.

Finally, here's a sample FOIA request, used with permission, based on texts used successfully by Seth Borenstein of Knight Ridder News Service.

[submit on letterhead:]

[Requester's address block]

Ms. Betty Lopez

FOIA Officer

United States Environmental Protection Agency

1200 Pennsylvania Avenue: 2822-T

Washington, DC 20460

(202) 566-1667 FAX (202) 566-2147

via E-mail at hq.foia@epa.gov; ONLY ELECTRONICALLY

[Date]

Dear Ms. Lopez,

I am [Name], reporter [or other job title] for [name of publication or outlet]. Pursuant to the federal Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. 552, I request access to and copies of the following materials:

[Point-by-point description of documents requested, as specific and helpful as possible].

As a news media representative I am only required to pay
(Continued next page)

Having problems with your FOIA request? Help is here.

What does the government tell you when you file a Freedom of Information Act request? Does it claim that exemptions apply? Does it refuse to expedite your request? Does it charge you exorbitant fees? Does it ignore your request and send you something else? Does it respond at all?

SEJ's First Amendment Task Force is gathering FOIA responses, non-responses and other horror stories that plague reporters who had hoped to write stories based at least in part on federal government records. We hope the collection will help target what goes wrong and what needs changing. Please let us know if and how federal FOIA requests are not working for you.

Making farfetched claims of "privacy," federal agencies have kept reporters from getting neighborhood information rel-

evant to endangered species protection or Superfund sites. Denials of records showing misuse of grazing permits protects privacy at the expense of accurate reporting on public land management. For "national security" reasons, the government is invoking exemptions to keep terrorists – and reporters, too – from learning about environmental hazards.

Please send your stories and/or copies of correspondence to foia@sej.org or mail them to Elizabeth Bluemink, c/o Juneau Empire, 1304 Abby Court, Juneau, AK 99801.

If they are not patently obvious, non-profane suggestions for improvement are welcome.

More information on SEJ's efforts to combat government secrecy is available at www.sej.org/foia/index5.htm.

— Rebecca Daugherty

FOIA... (from page 21)

for the direct cost of duplication after the first 100 pages. As a news media representative, I ask you to please waive any applicable fees. In the following eight paragraphs I will underscore my reasons in response to your guidelines on fee requests. I understand that is a separate process than my FOIA request. So I ask that you initiate both processes simultaneously. In other words, please start processing the FOIA request itself as you are doing the fee-waiver request. In the event that you disallow my fee-waiver request, I pledge to pay the price of the FOIA request up to \$[dollar amount, suggested not less than \$250]. Please notify me upon passing the \$100, \$200, \$300, and \$400 threshold if this is before a decision on fee-waiver request or if my fee-waiver is denied, however unwarranted that event may be. This paragraph should serve to authorize you to begin to accrue such charges, pending a decision on the fee-waiver request.

Through this FOIA request I am gathering vital information on the activities of the taxpayer-funded EPA that is important to the public's understanding of how its environmental protection agency spends public money and whether it is doing so in compliance with federal laws.

Now, let me specifically address the six hurdles used by the FOIA for fee-waiver determination.

1. The subject matter of the requested records must specifically concern identifiable operations or activities of the government. *[Explain why you meet this test, even if obvious].*

2. The disclosure should be "likely to contribute" to an understanding of government operations or activities. *[Explain why you meet this test, even if obvious].*

3. The disclosure must contribute to the understanding of the public at large, as opposed to the requester or a narrow segment of interested persons. *[Explain why you meet this test, even if obvious. Description of your audience and its size is helpful here.]*

4. The disclosure must contribute "significantly" to the public understanding of government operations. *[Explain why you meet this test, even if obvious].*

5. The disclosure will not serve any commercial interest of me as an individual. *[Explain why you meet this test, even if obvious. Borenstein's boilerplate: "My company will not likely sell a single newspaper more because of the disclosure. This is just a matter of a newspaper company fulfilling its public duty to ferret out the truth about the way government operates. In fact, the entire process will likely cost my company money."]*

6. The public interest in disclosure far outweighs commercial interest. *[Explain why you meet this test, even if obvious. Borenstein's boilerplate: "First, as shown above there is a massive amount of public interest. Second, as shown above, there is little if any commercial interest."]*

If my request is denied in whole or part, I ask that you justify all deletions by reference to specific exemptions of the Act and release all segregable portions of otherwise exempt material. I reserve the right to appeal.

As I am requesting this information as a daily journalist and this information is of timely value, please contact me by telephone, rather than by mail if you have questions regarding this request. My phone number is [phone number]. My e-mail is [e-mail]. I look forward to your reply within 10 business days, as the statute requires.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

[signed]

[printed name]

[job title]

[organization or company]

Michael Mansur edits the SEJournal and writes for The Kansas City Star. Special thanks to Ken Ward, Robert McClure, Joe Davis and Seth Borenstein for their contributions.

Can you predict the future?

Neither can we.

Please give generously to SEJ's 21st Century Fund to protect the future of environmental reporting.

Name		Phone Number (Area code first)	
Mailing Address			
City	State/Province	Zip/Postal Code	Country
☐ Check enclosed			
☐ Visa/Mastercard/AMEX		Expiration date	
Amount	Signature	Date	

Friend (\$1-\$100)

Supporter (\$101-\$500)

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Sustainer (\$1,001-\$2,500)

Guardian (\$2,501-\$5,000)

Champion (\$5,001-\$25,000)

Benefactor (\$25,001-\$50,000)

Your donation to the 21st Century Fund is tax-deductible. Income from the fund supports SEJ programs and operations as determined solely by SEJ's board of directors.

The SEJ 21st Century Fund is for gifts from individuals; SEJ does not accept grants or gifts from non-media corporations, government agencies and advocacy groups. The SEJ board reserves the right to review donations and decline any it deems inappropriate.



Application for Membership

Society of Environmental Journalists

P.O. Box 2492
Jenkintown, PA 19046
Phone: (215) 884-8174 Fax: (215) 884-8175 Email: sej@sej.org
<http://www.sej.org>

SEJ does not make membership eligibility decisions based on race, religion, gender, national origin or sexual orientation.

Return completed application with special-offer payment of \$20 US funds—\$15 for students. (Special offer applies to first-time members only. Previous members, please include \$40, or \$30 for renewing students, Canadian and Mexican members.)

Please include a résumé. Attach a business card if available.

Categories of membership:

Active: Persons primarily engaged in the gathering, reporting, editing, photographing, producing or cartooning of news for dissemination by regularly published, general circulation newspapers, magazines and newsletters, radio and television stations and networks, syndicated news services, online publications and other media available to the general public.

Associate: Persons who are substantially engaged in journalism or work in fields that closely relate to environmental journalism but are ineligible for active membership, either because journalism is not their primary occupation or because their employer lobbies or conducts public relations work on the environment. Associate members enjoy all the programs, services and discounts that active members do. Associate members may run and vote only in the election for their designated seat on the SEJ board.

Academic: Persons on the faculty or enrolled as students of an accredited college, university or other school who have an interest in environmental writing. Academic members enjoy all the programs, services and discounts that active members do. Academic members may run and vote only in the election for their designated seat on the SEJ board.

SEJ bylaws preclude from membership persons who engage in lobbying or public relations work relating to environmental issues and preclude from active membership persons whose employer engages in lobbying or public relations work relating to environmental issues.

SEJ defines lobbying as professional work primarily designed to influence legislation or government regulations. SEJ defines public relations as professional work on behalf of an organization, institution or business that promotes its views on issues affecting the organization, institution or business. It often involves issuing press releases or other statements to the media.

If you are uncertain about your eligibility, please refer to SEJ's bylaws at <http://www.sej.org/about/index5.htm> and SEJ's membership guidelines at <http://www.sej.org/join/index.htm>, or call (215) 884-8174 for a copy. SEJ staff is happy to help you should you need assistance.

1. Is journalism your primary occupation? Yes No

If yes, please go on to question 2.

If no, please consider questions 2 and 3 with regard to your primary employer as well as your journalism work.

2. Are you presently engaged in lobbying or public relations work relating to environmental issues? (See definitions above.)

Yes No

If you answered yes, we regret that you are not eligible for membership in SEJ. You are, however, welcome to subscribe to our quarterly newsletter, SEJournal, and to attend national conferences at a special subscriber's discount rate. Please see the enclosed SEJournal subscription form to determine your subscription rate. If you answered no, please go on to the next question.

3. Is your employer engaged in lobbying or public relations work relating to environmental issues? Yes No

If no, please go on to the next question.

If yes, you will most likely be eligible for SEJ's associate category, if other criteria for membership are met. Please complete the rest of the form.

4. Are you a full-time faculty member or student at an accredited college, university or other school? Yes No

If yes, you are most likely eligible for SEJ's academic category, if other criteria for membership are met. Please complete the rest of the form.

If you answered no to questions 2 and 3, you are most likely eligible for SEJ's active category. Please complete the rest of the form.

5. **Select one only:** Which one of the following most accurately describes your employment?

Author	Faculty	Freelancer	Magazine	News service	Newsletter
Newspaper	Nonprofit	Online Media	Photographer	Publisher	Radio
Student	Television	Other: _____			

6. Please list media companies for whom you report stories. Freelancers, please list your primary companies first. Feel free to add a page or refer us to your résumé.

7. Are the stories you publish or produce available to the general public? Yes No

8 Tell us about yourself. Please list any books, awards, special reports or other work you have done that you'd like us to be aware of.

9. I hereby apply for membership in the Society of Environmental Journalists and do attest that the information I have provided on this form is true and complete. I understand the Board of Directors retains sole authority in determining eligibility for membership in any category. I understand that my continuing eligibility depends upon my employment being acceptable for membership by the terms of the SEJ bylaws, and upon my returning a completed survey each year to the membership committee. I further understand that if I engage in professional activity which renders me ineligible for membership in SEJ, I will notify the membership committee and have my name withdrawn from the membership rolls.

Signature _____ Date _____

Please print

Name _____ Business Title _____

Employer (students, list school currently attended) _____

Publication or Department _____

Position _____
(Editor, producer, freelance journalist, photographer, student, etc.)

Mailing Address* (Work Home) _____

City _____ State/Province _____ Zip/Postal Code _____ Country _____

Alternate Address (Work Home) _____

City _____ State/Province _____ Zip/Postal Code _____ Country _____

Home Phone (_____) _____ Work Phone* (_____) _____ Fax* (_____) _____
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E-mail Address* _____
Primary Other

World Wide Web address _____

* For publication in the members-only Web site directory.

Where did you hear about SEJ? _____

Check enclosed

Receipt Requested

For Visa, Mastercard
or American Express:

Please make your check in U.S. funds payable to SEJ.

Mail to: SEJ, P.O. Box 2492, Jenkintown PA 19046

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Signature _____ Date _____

Dues are not deductible as Charitable Contributions for Income Tax Purposes. Dues may be considered ordinary and necessary business deductions.

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Notes _____
AC04-PGH

Fighting for the forests, exploring the changing climate

Redwoods activist is controversial long after her death

THE SECRET WARS OF JUDI BARI

By Kate Coleman

Encounter Books, \$25.95

Reviewed by JIM MOTAVALLI

In 1990, after Earth First! forest campaigner Judi Bari had been injured in a mysterious bombing that had made her the most famous woman in the North Woods, she was approached in her hospital room by fellow activists who wanted her to endorse Proposition 130, also known as the Forests Forever Initiative. If passed, it would have imposed a moratorium on old-growth logging and mandated a sustainable harvest.

But Bari wasn't interested. "Fuck elections," Kate Coleman quotes Bari as saying. "I'm going to get the FBI." Proposition 130 was narrowly defeated, as was the companion "Big Green" legislation.

Don't read "The Secret Wars of Judi Bari" if you think its subject belongs on a pedestal as the martyred Woman of the Woods. Don't read it if you admire Julia "Butterfly" Hill, either, because she's depicted here as a publicity hound who drives a Lexus SUV.

It's not surprising that Coleman's book is tremendously controversial in the North Woods, and her bookstore appearances have been picketed and cancelled. Critics point to the conservative credentials of its publisher, Encounter Books, whose other authors include affirmative action opponent Ward Connerly. They further charge that, despite her eulogy for it, Earth First! remains very much alive.

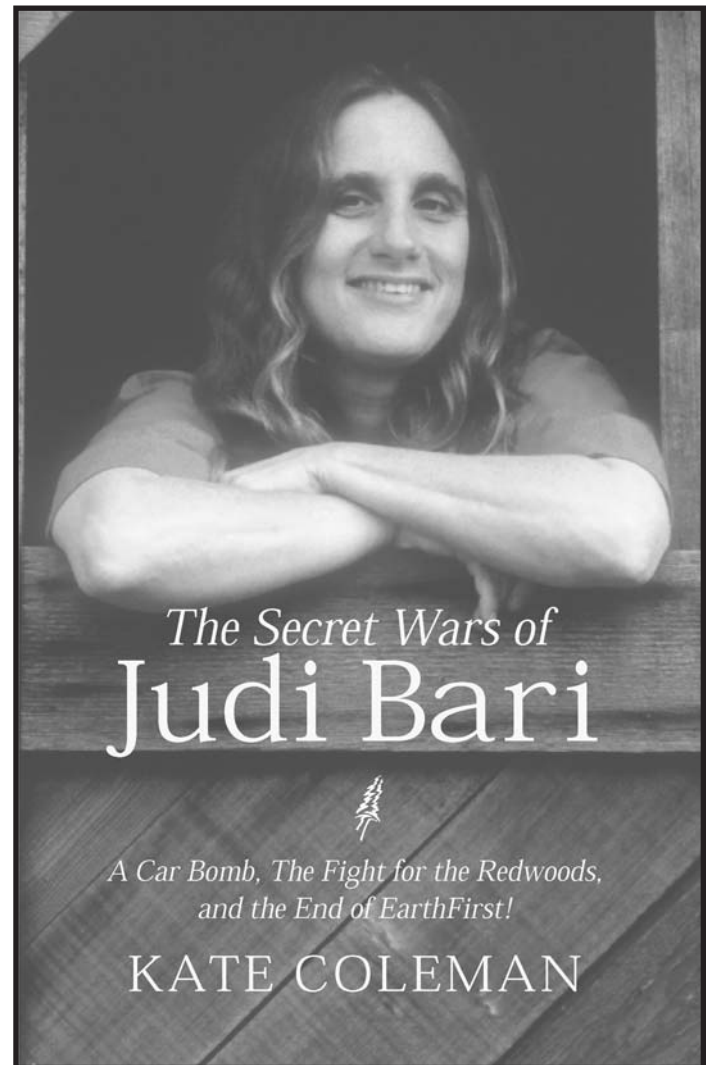
There is an entire website (www.colemanhoax.com) dedicated to debunking many of the claims in the book, including the notion that Julia "Butterfly" Hill drives an SUV. (The treesitter's non-driver's ID card is reproduced.) The activists, whose criticisms range from nitpicking to serious charges of inaccuracy, particularly resent one of the book's strongest themes – that Bari abandoned her work for the trees after the bombing to concentrate on her lawsuit against the FBI (which she eventually won).

Accuracy aside, "Secret Wars" is no right-wing tract. Coleman obviously has no great love for her subject, and occasionally convicts her on thin evidence. (If she really was a "needle freak" who "mainlined methamphetamine and possibly heroin," it's hard to see how she remained so effective for so long.) On balance, however, Coleman is at least respectful of Bari's cause, if not always of Bari herself.

Coleman acknowledges that Bari was a fierce warrior for the woods, and probably the key figure in the fight to stop Charles Hurwitz' Pacific Lumber from logging old-growth redwoods. With a solid grounding in labor organizing and a radical agenda, she helped push the nascent Earth First! beyond polite protest to blocking roads and confronting authority (the famous tree sits were one of its milder forms). She repeatedly put herself on the front lines.

An interesting theme of the book is Bari's relationship with her sister, reporter Gina Kolata of *The New York Times*. Coleman portrays Bari as alternatively contemptuous of and competitive with Kolata. Bari was a gifted writer herself, contributing articles to the North Coast's radical *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, though it's hard to imagine that such a polarized figure could have delivered balanced accounts.

The 1990 bombing remains unsolved, though Bari saw the FBI's fingerprints on the incident. While it remains possible that federal agents planted the bomb, there are many other suspects,



including (as the *Advertiser* pointed out tirelessly) members of her own inner circle. Bari won her celebrated lawsuit against the government (on false arrest grounds) but it's too early to close the case.

I spoke with Bari on the phone once and found her intense, obsessed with her case and very excitable, just like the woman who emerges from the pages of this book. It may not be the definitive work on this formidable figure, but it will do. Coleman's

(Continued next page)

biography will be followed by another from feminist writer Susan Faludi. And if you want to go straight to the source, Bari herself published a book called "Timber Wars" (Common Courage Press) in 1994.

Jim Motavalli is editor of E/The Environmental Magazine.



A deep look at the ecological and health impacts of sprawl

URBAN SPRAWL AND PUBLIC HEALTH: DESIGNING, PLANNING, AND BUILDING FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

By Howard Frumkin, Lawrence Frank, Richard Jackson
Island Press, \$30

Reviewed by SUSAN MORAN

That urban sprawl undermines air quality, public health and community may seem axiomatic – at least to environmental reporters. The authors of "Urban Sprawl and Public Health" don't offer breaking news on the topic.

But Howard Frumkin, Lawrence Frank and Richard Jackson do present a comprehensive synopsis of research on sprawl's impact on public and environmental health. Their footnotes and bibliography alone consume 90 pages, nearly a third of the book. And some of their insights are both illuminating and alarming.

The book's novelty and usefulness is reflected in the union of the three authors: Frumkin and Jackson are epidemiologists who have researched the health effects of air and water pollution, including toxic hazards. Frank is a landscape architect and land-use planner who has studied the influence of urban design on travel behavior, physical activity, air pollution and climate change.

The authors take the reader on a visual and olfactory journey from disease-ridden urban life in the 18th to mid-19th century United States, to the post-World War II suburban development boom, to the present entrenchment of urban sprawl. Now that I've read a vivid depiction of life with open gutters for sewage and no systematic trash collection, I'll complain less the next time the regional garbage hauler honors a Monday holiday and doesn't pick up a week's worth of trash.

The authors cite this 1864 memo by a New York City inspector: "As a rule, the streets are extremely dirty and offen-

sive, and the gutters obstructed with filth. The filth of the streets is composed of house-slops, refuse vegetables, decayed fruit, store and shop sweepings, ashes, dead animals, and even human excrements. These putrefying organic substances are ground together by the constantly passing vehicles..."

During the industrial age, the authors say, the combination of rotting trash, swamp gas from poorly drained areas and biomass combustion corroded air quality and contributed to an explosion of infectious diseases such as yellow fever, cholera, typhus and small pox.

Fast-forward to the present, where modern medicine and better infrastructure have eliminated many earlier causes of disease and death. What the books' authors are worried about now are the insidious illnesses caused or exacerbated by Americans' urge to live in big suburban homes far from convenient public transportation. People are driving longer distances to work, causing more air pollution that puts their families at increased risk of developing cancer as well as respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. The authors point to growing evidence that urban sprawl discourages physical activity, and thus contributes to epidemics such as Type 2 diabetes in children.

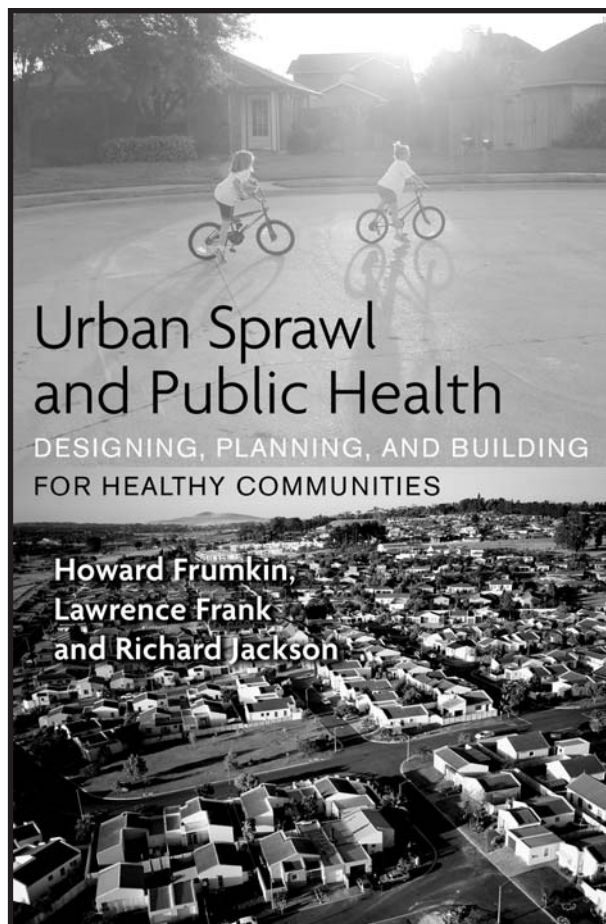
Sprawl also may contribute to groundwater depletion by converting soil that absorbs rainwater to impervious surfaces, primarily roads and parking lots. When the rainwater from paved surfaces runs off into streams and rivers, it causes non-point source water pollution.

But it needn't be all bad, the authors say. The book's final chapter, while scant on real-life examples, promotes "smart growth" principles derived from the Smart Growth Network, formed in 1996 by the EPA and several nonprofit and government organizations. Among the goals: mixed land uses, compact building design, walk-able neighborhoods, open space, diverse transportation choices and community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

"Urban Sprawl and Public Health" may not have the groundbreaking quality of Jane Jacobs' 1961 classic, "The Death and Life of Great American Cities," but it helps deepen and broaden the reader's understanding of how public health

and environmental health depend on each other, and how sprawl affects them jointly.

Susan Moran is a freelance journalist and journalism instructor at the University of Colorado-Boulder.



Look at Dow not balanced but interesting

TRESPASS AGAINST US: DOW CHEMICAL AND THE TOXIC CENTURY

By Jack Doyle.

Common Courage Press, \$24.95

Reviewed by TOM HENRY

Corporate watchdog-author Jack Doyle combines sharply worded prose and meticulous research to make some gutsy assertions about Dow Chemical Co., the world's largest chemical corporation.

A powerhouse in the Great Lakes region for decades, Dow generates more than \$32 billion a year in sales and runs more than 200 factories in 170 countries. It is the world's largest chlorine producer and one of the largest producers of plastics, pesticides and raw materials.

Doyle claims that Dow has both morally and legally trespassed on the lives of almost everyone with its chemicals. A harsh indictment? You bet.

"One of the results of the Nuremberg Trials after World War II was a universal agreement that civilized nations should not engage in chemical experimentation on humans, even in times of war," Doyle writes. "Dow Chemical is a main player in this experiment; the world's largest manufacturer of some of the most troubling compounds now used in commerce."

Many are oblivious to Dow's influence, he asserts, despite events such as the 1984 disaster in Bhopal, India that killed 8,000 people and sickened thousands more. In 2001, Dow acquired Union Carbide, the company to blame for the catastrophic leak. The impact of Bhopal is still being assessed more than 20 years later and Dow denies corporate liability.

Doyle claims Dow's corporate image today is a carryover from the public relations campaign it orchestrated after the negative publicity it received from producing during the Vietnam War the chemical defoliant Agent Orange and the highly flammable, jellied gasoline explosive known as napalm.

In response, Dow says Doyle is a "prolific anti-corporate writer" and has labeled his book "a revisionist history of Dow, weaving together distortions of unrelated issues and events over Dow's 107-year history, into a biased slant."

According to a statement issued by Dow spokesman Scot Wheeler, the book "denigrates the truth" about Dow and the benefits that society has received from chemistry – from enhanced technology to improved worker safety.

Dow was no fan of the late Rachel Carson, either. Her 1962 epic "Silent Spring" raised questions about the toxicity of DDT and other chlorine-based insecticides. Carson is credited for inspiring a generation of scientists to look for links between chemical exposure and cancer.

Doyle runs a Washington-based investigative research firm that specializes in business and environmental issues. He has written about technology, business and the environment for more than 20 years.

The allegations he makes against Dow are sweeping.

How responsible is Dow for its chemical legacy? How credible was the science at the time the pollution was released? Was industry given a free pass because of political pressure?

Doyle takes a crack at answering many of the hard questions. The evidence he presents doesn't cast Dow in a favorable light.

In the Great Lakes region, the public has been impacted by Dow's dioxin in Michigan's Tittabawassee River and Saginaw Bay. The toxic substance is believed to have been a problem at Dow for more than 40 years. In January, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality announced it reached an agreement with Dow to reduce citizen exposure to dioxin in Midland and along the Tittabawassee.

Consumers also have come in contact with Dow when they inhale plastic fumes off Saran Wrap or suffered leaky silicone breast implants, Doyle says. The latter were produced by a Dow subsidiary in Midland, Dow Corning.

One weakness of Doyle's book is that he glosses over those who share some responsibility in Dow's questionable activities.

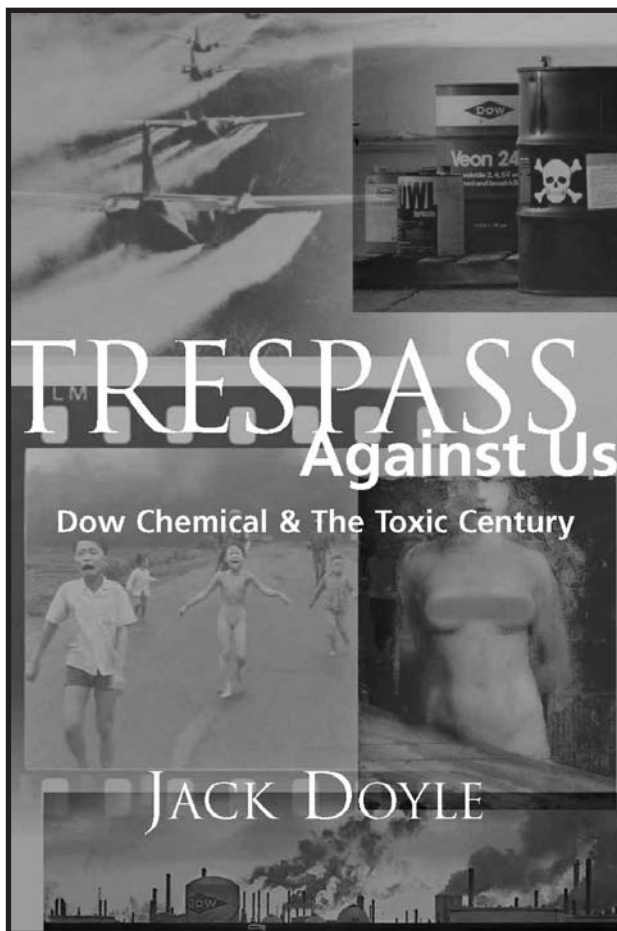
Dow produced Agent Orange and napalm under contract with the U.S. government. How accountable is the government for selecting DDT and napalm for its Vietnam-era warfare arsenal?

Dow also produced resins found in those old, bulky Big Mac styrofoam containers of the 1970s. Doyle says Dow produced much of the plastic that "litters the world's coastlines, oceans, lakes, streams and forests."

Oh, really? What about the slobs who threw their Big Mac styrofoam containers out of their moving cars in the 1970s? Or who continue to litter the landscape with discarded plastics?

The breadth of Doyle's book is complex and intriguing but the narrative is disjointed at times. The writing and organization of chapters could have been honed with stronger editing.

Tom Henry covers the environment for The Toledo Blade in Ohio.



The impacts of football and other recent revelations

By MIKE DUNNE

Ever wonder about the environmental footprint of something like one of the nation's fall obsessions – an NCAA football game?

environmental investigative reporting. I start by bringing in a few scientists, activists and government officials to talk about environmental issues. I bring in several environment reporters to talk about

of trash we collected. My journalistic antennae quivered: How much is there? What's in it? Can any of it be recycled?

"No one knew the answer. And I figured, 'Hey, I've got a class of curious students. We could find out.'"

There was immediate buy-in by the class, Poulson said. "The litter idea was easy. People have long complained about it blowing around at the university tailgate areas. University officials instituted some minor alcohol restrictions on tailgaters last fall and claimed that it also helped the litter problem. It was visible and newsy.

"And I had a colleague who is an expert in statistical analysis to help us draw a scientific sample of stadium trash."

"We broadened the effort to cover what we had learned about other environmental issues. The idea: Use the concept of an environmental footprint analysis on an activity like football.

"Football was the target, but the idea was to raise awareness that most activities

have environmental costs that we don't consider. As frustrating as it can be to be a Spartan fan, I like football. It's not like we were trying to trash the sport. We were just curious," he said.

"We brainstormed about environmental costs – energy and water consumption, fertilizer inputs to the natural turf, ozone-producing emissions of tailgaters' grills, consumption of fuel by buses that shuttle fans from parking lots to the games, emissions from cars that carry fans to the games.

"One thing we didn't do was to link stadium energy use to the amount of university power plant emissions created by that demand. We talked about it in a general way, and reported total emissions. But it was just too hard to parse out the stadium impact," Poulson said.

"One student was interested in
(Continued next page)



SEJ member Dave Poulson wondered about the environmental effects of football. The students in his investigative environmental reporting class at Michigan State University answered the question by sorting trash accumulated at MSU's Spartan Stadium. Turns out, trash is a good story.

As a volunteer helping his son's band during a fundraiser, Michigan State University Knight Center for Environmental Journalism instructor **Dave Poulson** found himself cleaning up Spartan Stadium. The experience hatched an idea for students to look at the environmental cost of the classic clashes that occur every Saturday as fall begins to turn toward winter.

It was one of many stories covering the environment in a unique way during the end of 2004 and the first month of 2005.

Stories ranged from new research that prairie dogs "talk" and even have local "dialects" to the traditional topics of water and air pollution.

The Michigan State students did the football footprint story as part of a class project for Poulson. "Each fall I teach a class at Michigan State University called

their work. We analyze some SEJ contest entries.

"But the meat of the class is to identify a project and use much of the semester to report it," Poulson said. "That's the tough part. Students have lots of ideas. They don't always agree. And some ideas are just too difficult to tackle during a semester – or at all.

"Usually I listen to the ideas and then make an autocratic decision – just like an editor," he said. "This year's idea came because my son plays in the band of a nearby high school. Band members and their parents pick up the litter inside the MSU stadium on the Sunday after one home football game. The university pays several community groups to do this through the season as a fundraiser for their organizations," Poulson said.

"So while pitching in on the litter detail, I was surprised to see the mountain

attempts to expand Michigan's deposit law to include bottled water containers. She wrote a sidebar reporting that there are enough bottles sold at a single game to stack them more than 500 times the height of Beaumont Tower, a campus landmark. It was paired with photos of half-full water bottles rolling down the stands.

"A broadcast student produced a five-minute documentary of the project that was shown on local television. She also worked with a university professor to determine the litter sample size," Poulson said.

"Someone else mapped the campus tailgating sections and assigned students to count the grills in each before a game. A student who is a good organizer figured out how to categorize the trash and oversaw that operation. Her husband, a syndicated cartoonist, volunteered to create an illustration and a pie chart," Poulson said.

Several other students took on various aspects of the story. "For the litter work, everyone showed up on a Saturday immediately after a game. We picked up trash, put it into barrels and then sorted and quantified it beneath the stadium. I give the students a lot of credit for giving up a good chunk of a Saturday for some messy work.

"We addressed the roots of this psychology in a sidebar called, 'The Freud of Littering,'" Poulson said.

"We offered the project to the local *Lansing State Journal*. They turned us down, which may not be too surprising because it has a lot of copy, images and graphics," Poulson said. "But the *Detroit Free Press*, Michigan Public Radio and the *State News* – the independent student newspaper – ran stories about our findings," Poulson said.

The class produced an extensive website: www.environmental.jrn.msu.edu/football.

Water was a common story topic this fall and early winter.

Glen Martin of the *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote Nov. 27 about how the Napa River has changed over the past 20-30 years – for the better. Last year, however, there was a sign of that change. "This river was full of salmon," said Chris Cordano, a St. Helena resident. "I've lived here about 15 years, and I noticed there were more fish coming back a few years ago. But last fall was different – it was really a banner year. They were jumping over the rocks under the Zinfandel Lane

Bridge like popcorn shooting out of a popper," Martin wrote.

Dawn Fallik of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* wrote on Nov. 28 about tests that are finding traces of drugs, herbicides and fragrances, even birth-control hormones and weed killers, in the nation's drinking water.

Where once experts thought the water-filtration process would eliminate the chemicals, new studies, including surveys in Philadelphia and New Jersey, have discovered otherwise. One water industry investigation into 18 drinking-water plants nationwide found the compounds in 14 of them, Fallik wrote.

The amounts being found are infinitesimal – in parts per billion or trillion. But studies show that male and female fish can develop the other sex's proteins and organs when there are chemicals that mimic hormones in the water in parts per billion. What is unclear: the effects on humans.

The American Water Works Research Association in Denver, which funded the nationwide drinking-water-plant survey, is conducting a two-year study on the health effects of the chemicals.

Walter pollution is found in pristine areas, too. Mountain streams and drinking wells in eastern Colorado showed traces of wastewater pollutants expected only in urban areas, wrote the *Denver Post's Theo Stein* in a Jan. 20 article. Some of the 62 chemicals identified in a new study by the U.S. Geological Survey are known to cause reproductive abnormalities in fish; others may help create drug-resistant bacteria in the environment. The chemicals were found in exceedingly small quantities – generally in parts per billion or less. None of the contaminants exceeded current drinking-water standards, but no standards exist for many of them.

On Nov. 28, **Don Hopey** of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* wrote about mining plans that would disrupt a tributary of Maple Creek – a problem that might just open a new door for stream protections. UMCO/Maple Creek Inc. wants to do longwall coal mining under the tributary and would remove 700,000 gross tons of coal from a 2,700-foot-long, 750-foot-wide "panel" of the Pittsburgh seam under the creek, Hopey wrote. Removing all of the seam's coal by the longwall method would result in surface subsidence of three to four feet and cause the springs and

creek to stop flowing.

On Dec. 4, **Eric Stern** of *The Modesto Bee* wrote about a judge's order that three San Joaquin Valley irrigation districts examine how toxic chemicals used to control algae and weeds in canals might harm plants, wildlife and drinking water.

Tom Meersman of the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* wrote on Dec. 20 about an unusual coalition of environmental, business and farm groups that has proposed an ambitious plan to raise \$80 million a year to clean up contaminated lakes and rivers by charging most Minnesotans an extra \$36 a year on their water bills or property taxes. The proposal, called "Clean Water Legacy: a partnership to restore Minnesota's impaired waters," is certain to receive hearings at the State Capitol. The supporters include the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, the largest business association in the state; the Minnesota Environmental Partnership, a coalition of 88 environmental and conservation groups; the Minnesota League of Cities, and both the Minnesota Farmers Union and the Minnesota Farm Bureau.

The Washington Post continued to follow the saga of lead in the public water system, a story it has been following about a year now. On Jan. 22, **Carol D. Leonnig** wrote that federal investigators had announced that the D.C. Water and Sewer Authority violated federal law by claiming that the water in more than 400 District homes had safe levels of lead and by not replacing that number of lead service lines. The EPA ordered the water authority to notify the homeowners of the error, to offer new water tests and to advise them to flush their water lines or filter water before drinking it.

PERC – perchlorate – has been found in water supplies around the country and several news organizations have written about the rocket fuel chemical.

Glenn Singer and **Neil Santaniello** of the South Florida *Sun-Sentinel* wrote Dec. 7 that government scientists have found potentially unhealthy levels of the chemical in more than 90 percent of the milk and lettuce sampled nationwide, according to data posted on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration Web site. Perchlorate could be contaminating water supplies and causing harm to unborn babies, infants and children by affecting

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the thyroid gland's ability to produce developmental hormones, they wrote. "Nobody knows, though, how serious the risk is – or at what level perchlorate becomes dangerous. And there are no federal safety regulations to limit the levels found in water used for drinking or irrigation. While some high perchlorate levels elsewhere have been traced to leaks at defense operations, the source of the chemical here remains unknown."

David Danelski of *The (Riverside) Press-Enterprise* wrote about the experiences of science writer **Rebecca Renner** who found an article she wrote on perchlorate for the September 2002 issue of the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* had been drastically rewritten. A paid consultant for the perchlorate industry had assisted one of the journal's editors in rewriting Renner's work.

The problems with megafarms also continued to make news.

On Nov. 27, **Fran Henry** of *The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer* wrote about the tribulations of Bob and Diane Thornell. They were forced to abandon their home and both have been diagnosed with brain damage. Their symptoms worsen when they linger in the neat brick house where they lived before a large hog farm moved in nearby – one of eight hog farms built in Paulding County since 1994. While they and others struggle with the reality of megafarms of hogs, cows and turkeys in their sparsely populated northwest Ohio rural county, the Ohio Department of Agriculture welcomes the farms as assets to Ohio's economy, Henry wrote.

The Sacramento Bee's **Jennifer M. Fitzenberger** wrote a Nov. 24 story about a new California study that questioned whether animals suffer when grown in large dairy cattle, beef cattle and poultry farms. Produced by the Office of Research, the report explores the concerns of environmentalists and animal rights activists about confined animal facilities, ranging from the debeaking of poultry to how dairy owners dispose of cow waste. Senate President Pro Tem John Burton, who requested the report, said consumers and policy-makers should be concerned, but he didn't recommend specific legislation. Agricultural industry leaders called the Senate report misleading and shabbily researched.

Beth Casper of the Salem (Ore.)

Statesman Journal wrote Nov. 26 about the conflicts between residents who move out into the countryside and find pesticides drifting from nearby orchards. Orchard owner Rick Johnson told Casper he is frustrated that people aren't more understanding of farming practices. "People like to live in the country, but they don't like all of the things that go with the country," he said. Typical farmer-homeowner conflicts are about noise or odor but increasingly conflicts are arising from pesticide application and drift, Casper wrote.

Remnants of old buried toxic chemicals also attracted attention.

Karen Dillon of *The Kansas City Star* wrote Nov. 20 about the federal government selling peaceful country acreage in western Missouri – lots where the driveways and fences are already built. But beneath each plot is a Cold War-era, Minuteman II missile silo laced with cancer-causing chemicals. "The Air Force removed the missiles and imploded the silos several years ago, burying the concrete structures along with polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, and several other contaminants such as asbestos and fuel," she wrote. Buyers of the 150 plots are prohibited from digging deeper than 2 feet, installing water wells or building structures without government permission, she wrote.

Back on the east coast, *The Virginian-Pilot* wrote about another historical legacy on Jan. 14. Reporters **Debbie Messina**, **Robert McCabe** and **Claudia Assis** told the story of a neighborhood where buried chemical wastes were discovered that have now sparked a state investigation. Residents of Deep Creek said they were never told about an old dump on the site when they bought their homes. However, the developer, William T. Wingfield, disputed their claim. "We informed everybody at the point where lots were sold," Wingfield said. He could not be sure second and third owners of homes got the same information, the trio reported.

John Heilprin of *The Associated Press* wrote that at the current pace of cleanup work, it could take up to 35 years and \$280 billion to fix most of the nation's existing and yet-to-be-discovered hazardous waste sites, according to the government. The story ran in newspapers Dec. 3. A report by the EPA described what taxpayers and private industry will be spending to fix sites contaminated with hazardous waste and petroleum products. It

estimated 77,000 such sites, with up to 9,267 more discovered each year.

The 20th anniversary of the Bhopal accident – which ushered in the nation's Right-To-Know laws – was a launching point for several news organizations to look at toxic chemicals in their communities. *Charleston Gazette's* **Ken Ward Jr.** wrote on Dec. 2 about the methyl isocyanate gas, or MIC, that is still stored in Institute, W. Va. MIC was the substance that leaked and killed thousands in Bhopal. Today, the former Carbide plant in Institute – now owned by Bayer – still stores roughly four times the MIC that leaked at Bhopal. One of only three U.S. facilities that store the chemical, it accounts for more than 90 percent of the stockpiles and 95 percent of the emissions nationwide, according to disclosures filed with EPA.

Coverage of air pollution seemed to also focus a lot on new fine particle regulations. On Dec. 18, *New York Times'* **Michael Janofsky** wrote that about a third of all Americans live in counties that do not meet seven-year-old standards for microscopic particles of pollution that cause thousands of premature deaths a year, according to the EPA.

The 20 states affected have three years to develop plans to bring their problem counties into compliance by 2010, or face the loss of federal highway money. The fine particles are produced by a variety of sources, including car exhausts, wood-burning stoves and power plants and are known as PM 2.5, or particulate matter measuring no more than 2.5 microns. That's tiny – a fraction of the width of a human hair. The particles are so small they can lodge deep in the lungs if inhaled.

On Dec. 17, **Sara Shipley** of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* wrote about her area not meeting the standard while not far away, **Jim Bruggers** of *The (Louisville) Courier-Journal* also wrote about how his area fared with the new regulations, which actually date back seven years. "The fine particle standard, a product of the Clinton administration in 1997, was held up by legal challenges from industry and business groups as a potential drain on the economy. But in the meantime, as the government has required power plants and diesel engines to cut pollution, the levels of fine particles in many areas –

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including Louisville – have improved,” Bruggers wrote.

Tom Henry of the *Toledo Blade* weighed in with a piece, too, on Dec. 18. “Ohio is No. 1 in terms of counties that have unhealthy levels of sooty particulate matter floating in the air,” he wrote.

Also on the air pollution front was a Jan. 14 *Los Angeles Times* story by **Miguel Bustillo** about an interim report from the National Academy of Sciences questioning the Bush administration’s “Clear Skies” proposal to rewrite the nation’s chief air-quality rules for power plants. The report said the new proposal would not reduce pollution as much as existing Clean Air Act regulations. He then cited the round of sparring that such a report causes in Washington. That report can be found at: www.nap.edu/catalog/11208.html

The (Akron) Beacon Journal’s Bob Downing wrote a three-part series on Dec. 12-14 looking at the Ohio contractor that tests auto exhausts as part of the state’s air pollution control program, called “e-check.” The vehicle emission test is required in 14 Ohio counties and costs Ohioans \$37 million a year. He looked at how it is working, whether it is helping clean the air and whether there might be better ways to proceed when the 10-year contract expires in 2005.

Several newspapers continued to watch for a “blended sewage” decision from the EPA.

A Dec. 4 *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* story asked the question: “Should Seattle and other large cities be allowed to skip part of the sewage-treatment process when heavy rains threaten to overwhelm their sewage systems?” The policy change was proposed by the EPA more than a year ago and has attracted nearly 100,000 written comments from industry, state and local officials, interest groups and the public. Local sewage treatment agencies have lobbied heavily for the change, saying they need an affordable solution to the problem of treatment plants that become overwhelmed by heavy flows during rainstorms and snowmelts.

John Cramer of the *Roanoke Times* wrote about that community’s efforts to build a more sophisticated treatment plant in the paper’s Dec. 4 edition.

Electronic wastes seemed to recycle its importance back onto new pages.

Susan Gordon of the *Tacoma (Wash.) News Tribune* wrote Dec. 4 about tons of potentially hazardous waste piling up in household storage areas, closets, spare rooms and garages throughout the state of Washington. The state Department of Ecology is studying ways to keep discarded electronic components from contaminating the state’s air, land and water. Advocates of a comprehensive statewide solution say they’re trying to head off a potential environmental catastrophe.

Also writing in early December, AP Technology Writer **Ellen Simon** wrote that when Office Depot, Inc. stores ran an electronics recycling drive last summer, some stores were overwhelmed by the amount of e-trash they received. But a mobile phone recycling drive by Westchester County, N.Y., home to more than 900,000 people, collected just 32 cell phones, which the county sold on eBay Inc. for \$82.

Simon wrote: “No current figures exist for how much e-junk is recycled, but people in the industry believe it’s a sliver of the total. People simply don’t know where to take their e-trash, so much of it sits in drawers. The toxic materials many electronics contain, such as lead and mercury, present more obstacles. A National Safety Council study done four years ago found that less than 10 percent of techno trash was recycled.”

Juliet Eilperin of *The Washington Post* also wrote on Jan. 21 about “e-waste.” She said more than three years after federal and industry officials began to talk about the topic, the dilemma is worse than it was before. Americans dispose of 2 million tons of electronic products a year – including 50 million computers and 130 million cell phones – and by 2010, the nation will be discarding 400 million electronic units annually, according to the International Association of Electronics Recyclers.

A deadly South Carolina train derailment that released chlorine that killed nine people and led to the evacuation of 5,400 others brought the transportation of toxic materials back on the front burner for a while.

Eric M. Weiss of *The Washington Post* wrote on Jan. 11 that a new effort to ban trains carrying chlorine and other dangerous chemicals past the U.S. Capitol and through the region was picking up steam. Weiss quoted Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton

(D-D.C.) as saying: “This region and the federal establishment are sleeping through the most pressing security issue facing the entire region.” Similar legislation was defeated last year after homeland security and railroad officials reassured Mayor Anthony A. Williams and others that they would reduce the risk to city residents. A CSX Corp. rail line in the District moves 8,500 chemical cars a year through the city, though only a fraction of those chemicals are toxic when inhaled. Weiss reported that a chief U.S. Naval Research Laboratory scientist projected that a worst-case release from a 90-ton tanker car of chlorine during an Independence Day celebration on the Mall might kill 100 people a second and 100,000 in 30 minutes.

On Jan. 16, **Michael Dresser** of *The (Baltimore) Sun* reminded readers about the Howard Street Tunnel fire that brought rail traffic along the East Coast to a standstill nearly four years ago. It didn’t kill anyone – but trains carrying deadly chemicals such as chlorine continue to rumble through the heart of Baltimore with little notice and little apparent security. Baltimore officials are aware of the risk. They are doing their part to lessen the traffic by phasing out the use of pure chlorine to treat wastewater and replacing it with less dangerous bleach, according to Kurt L. Kocher, a spokesman for the city Department of Public Works.

On the same day, **Alex Nussbaum** wrote in the *Bergen County Record* about how pervasive chlorine is in New Jersey. Environmentalists and other activists say the South Carolina incident hammers home what they’ve been saying for years – the government needs to keep a closer eye on the safety and security of chemicals and the industry needs to find alternatives for its most hazardous materials.

The New York Times was one of many newspapers carrying stories about a new study on the impacts of benzene. In a Dec. 2 story, **Andrew Revkin** wrote: “The first study of a large group of workers breathing air with very low levels of benzene suggests that the chemical may harm the bone marrow, the body’s main factory for blood cells, even in amounts below the threshold deemed safe under American law.” The researchers said 250 Chinese shoe-factory workers exposed to small amounts of benzene (less than one part
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per million) in the air were 15 to 18 percent lower protective in white blood cell counts than a similar group of 140 garment workers who were not exposed. The lower blood counts were not in a range deemed harmful, but independent experts said the findings strongly hinted that benzene was one of a small group of chemicals for which no safe threshold exists.

In the Jan. 17 *Chemical and Engineering News*, writer **Bette Hileman** wrote about the comeback of methyl bromide, the ozone-depleting pesticide. The 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer is considered the most successful environmental treaty. As a result of this accord, worldwide production and use of ozone-depleting chemicals has declined sharply, and the hole that had formed in the stratospheric ozone is expected to begin healing within a few decades.

And finally, wildlife issues, especially in the West, continued to make news.

Richard Rainey of *The New York Times* wrote about how coyotes are becoming common in Washington, D.C..

National Park Service ranger Ken Ferebee spotted one while conducting a nocturnal deer count in Rock Creek Park. "We're not sure how many we have at this point," Ferebee said. "At least two, maybe four or five."

Mitch Tobin of the *Arizona Daily Star* wrote on Jan. 22 that the Tucson-based Center for Biological Diversity was ordered to pay rancher and banker Jim Chilton \$600,000 because the environmental group defamed him with a press release and photos posted on its website. In a 9-1 verdict, jurors in Pima County Superior Court awarded Chilton \$100,000 for the harm done to his reputation and Arivaca Cattle Company. The jury tacked on an additional \$500,000 in punitive damages meant to punish the Center and deter others from committing libel.

Many of the Center's 21 photos depicted barren patches with captions described as "denuded" by cows. But Chilton's lawyer showed jurors wide-angle photos taken at the same locations that revealed the surroundings with oaks and mesquites dotting lush, rolling hills, Tobin wrote.

Tania Soussan of the *Albuquerque Journal* wrote Jan. 23 about a growing number of ranchers across the West eyeing a proposal backed by Santa Fe-based Forest Guardians and other environmental groups to use taxpayer money to buy out and retire federal land grazing leases.

Soussan also wrote a Nov. 26 story about research that shows prairie dogs, those little pups popping in and out of holes on vacant lots around town and rural rangelands, are talking up a storm. She wrote: "They have different 'words' for tall human in yellow shirt, short human in green shirt, coyote, deer, red-tailed hawk and many other creatures. They can even coin new terms for things they've never seen before." Her source, Con Slobodchikoff, a Northern Arizona University biology professor and prairie dog linguist, said the pups independently come up with the same calls or words.

Mike Dunne is assistant editor of the SEJournal and a reporter at The Advocate in Baton Rouge, La.

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