Polluted Science = Bad Policies for Human and Environmental Health

Every recent presidential administration has had corporate interests who have gotten “inside” access to policy decisions, but, according to watchdog groups, this has risen to unprecedented levels in the administrations of George W. Bush. The consequences for policies on human health and environmental protection have been stunning. In 2001, secret energy advisory group meetings with Vice President Dick Cheney resulted in aggressive initiatives to increase use of fossil fuels and nuclear energy, and roll back of policies to clean up toxic emissions of power plants.

In 2002, health and environmental watchdog groups accused Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson of replacing respected scientists with industry insiders on influential committees advising the Centers for Disease Control on lead poisoning prevention, environmental health, and other issues. Playing politics with these appointments resulted in conflicts of interest that were never disclosed, violating a federal law governing federal advisory committees.

In July of 2004, scientists, academics, journalists, and policy advocates gathered at a Washington, DC conference sponsored by the Center for Science in the Public Interest to debate corporations’ use of science to frustrate protect regulations, thwart research on health risks, and corrupt evidence-based medicine. Featured speakers included fired EPA scientist Dr. David Lewis, whose work on the health effects of sludge spreading have been called “junk” by the sludge industry, and Eric Schaeffer, who resigned as EPA’s enforcement chief in 2002 in protest of the administration undercutting his offices’ efforts to make old power plants meet modern standards. Speakers documented the deliberate efforts by corporations and administration appointees to silence conscientious government and independent scientists. Clean Water for NC participated in

Clean Water Lead Testing Featured in National HealthLetter

Following a year of startling revelations about high lead levels in the drinking water of many major cities nationwide, as well as an investigative report indicating that many cities were underreporting lead drinking water violations to EPA, it’s never been more important to test your water for lead. In its March, 2005 issue, the Center for Science in the Public Interest published information on the ongoing scandal of lead in our home environment, including our drinking water, in its weekly newsletter, Nutrition Action HealthLetter.

Dr. Rick Maas, Co-Director of the UNC-Asheville’s Environmental Quality Institute and leading drinking water researcher, points out, “We know what to do to cost effectively prevent dangerous lead levels in drinking water, but there’s no substitute for testing your own water at the tap.” Most lead in drinking water comes from old pipes and fixtures, but scientists have worked out methods to prevent corrosion of lead from pipes, even where new disinfection treatments (chloramines instead of chlorine) increase corrosion. The article features the non-profit Clean Water Lead Testing service, based at the Institute.

Clean Water Lead Testing’s low priced two sample kits, with analysis carried out by a certified drinking water laboratory, provide outstanding service and information to the public. Proceeds from kit sales go entirely to fund drinking water research at EQI as well as advocacy and education by Clean Water for North Carolina. Thousands of Nutrition Action readers have joined more than 130,000 US households who have had their home drinking water tested for lead by this non-profit service. To order kits or for extensive information on health risks of lead and arsenic exposure, visit www.leadtesting.org.

EPA Accepts Testing of Pesticides on Humans, even Kids!

In February, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency formally adopted a policy of accepting experiments conducted by pesticide companies and chemical manufacturers using human subjects. Still worse, the agency indefinitely delayed any development of ethical rules to protect test subjects.

According to Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, this policy was the result of ongoing requests of chemical companies seeking to justify higher exposure limits. EPA will allow dosing of infants and pregnant women with commercial poisons. EPA itself planned to directly conduct a controversial study (with the acronym CHEERS) that would pay parents to spray pesticides and other chemicals in the rooms occupied by infants under age 3, as well as giving them items of clothing and other benefits, an approach that will clearly select for families of low income and education. TAKE ACTION: TELL EPA WHAT YOU THINK OF TESTING PESTICIDES ON CHILDREN! Go to www.pested.org or call (919) 833-1123.
Our Mission

Clean Water for North Carolina promotes clean, safe water and environments and empowered, just communities for all North Carolinians through organizing, education, advocacy and technical assistance.

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Greetings from our 2005 Board and Staff Winter Retreat


Polluted Science continued from page 1

the conference and supports this movement for scientific integrity in public policy. To protest corporate pollution of scientific basis of policies, visit www.cspinet.org or call CWFNC at (919) 401-9600.

Media Mostly Silent on Scientists’ and Groups’ Funding & Biases

A national survey by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) found that academic scientists and independent organizations had much higher credibility in judging the safety of drugs or other health related federal policies as compared to industry-funded experts. Survey respondents said that news media should tell the public whether information in their articles comes from scientists or organizations who receive funding from corporations, common even in universities. Many groups with neutral or watchdog sounding names like the American Council on Science and Health, the Center for Consumer Freedom may actually be largely funded by corporations, but reporters seldom investigate or report financial connections. CSPI Director Michael Jacobsen points out that it tells us something about whether a group is operating in the public interest if it fails to disclose its funding sources, so that should be reported too. Tell your media sources that you expect full disclosure of conflicts of interest from experts that they use in investigations!

Perchlorate Drinking Water Standard Influenced by Military and its Contractors

A National Academy of Sciences’ (NAS) report released in February concluded that a higher exposure level to the toxic rocket fuel ingredient perchlorate than recommended by the Environmental Protection Agency is not harmful. The Natural Resources Defense Council and other environmental health groups say this conclusion would threaten the health of millions of American children. The NAS recommended a level that is about 23 times higher than that proposed by EPA and several states health agencies.

The groups accuse the White House of waging a disinformation campaign and strong-arm tactics on NAS members to influence the report, and have. The panel’s weak recommendation for babies and pregnant women is based on one weak industry study that fed perchlorate at that level to only seven healthy adults for two weeks.

Instead of protective standards, the panel recommended adding iodine to all prenatal vitamins, a measure that outrages health advocates as allowing exposure to poison gas and then handling out gas masks. Despite the NAS panel’s recommendation, EPA and states could set a drinking water standard for perchlorate at 1 to 4 parts per billion, but it may be tougher to do so in states with a significant presence of military bases and contractors, like North Carolina. Stay tuned for opportunities to get involved in calling for a strong perchlorate standard with CWFNC!

“Clear Skies” Policy Denies Mercury Impacts on Hundreds of Thousands

The Bush Administration’s Clear Skies initiative, stalemated by a Senate Committee vote in early March, would include serious rollbacks of EPA’s plans to reducing mercury emissions, based largely on industry statements that there is no research linking mercury exposure to lowered IQ. During earlier federal hearings on mercury policy, CWFNC testified that these rollbacks were “an appalling evisceration of EPA’s own Environmental Justice mission,” as they would have greatest impact on women, children, the poor and minority populations. While this vote is a victory for communities and kids, stay tuned, as polluters will probably keep trying for these rollback!

Using several studies examining the effects of lead exposure on IQ, Mount Sinai Center for Children’s Health and the Environment researchers found that hundreds of thousands of children are born each year with mercury levels that could cost them $30,000 or more in lifetime earnings due to reduced IQ, leading to missed educational opportunities or jobs. The researchers estimate that over 300,000 children are born in the U. S. each year with mercury levels associated with IQ losses up to 24 points, and a smaller number with even more serious neurological impacts.
The Ins and Outs of Wastewater Treatment
Where it comes from and where it goes

Influent Pipes—These pipes carry wastewater from homes, business and industry to the wastewater treatment plant, and often lie along streams. Sometimes influent lines are “gravity fed,” more often they have occasional “pump stations” to move the waste along. Aging lines can develop leaks, allowing large volumes of water into them during storms, exceeding the capacity of the pipes and the plant. This causes overflows of untreated sewage—sometimes for days before detection and repair—at pump stations and “manholes” along the pipes, a chronic pollution problem. To fix our nation’s aging pipes will require billions of public $$.

Pretreated Industrial Waste—Nearly all municipal wastewater plants accept large volumes of industrial waste piped directly through “influent” pipes, supposedly pretreated to remove most heavy metals and toxic organic compounds. Unfortunately, pretreatment systems are tested only periodically for a limited number of compounds, and can fail altogether, so toxics are mixed with household waste at the plant. No municipal waste treatment plant can treat or remove these pollutants, so they can poison the plant’s biological secondary treatment, and end up in streams and sludge.

Domestic Sewage

Storm Overflow

Primary Sedimentation

Primary Sludge

Primary Sludge

Activated Sludge

Settlement Tanks

Secondary Sludge Treatment

Trickle Filter

Alternative Processes

Surplus Secondary Sludge

The "headworks" - a term applied to the actual tanks and systems (settling, primary and secondary treatment) at the wastewater plant itself (not including the influent lines). Headworks overflows can also occur during high flow events where water leaks into pipes.

Secondary Waste Treatment—Required of all municipal systems now, uses live bacteria cultivated in the system to remove nutrient pollutants (for example: soluble nitrogen, which would cause algae growth, is transformed into normal atmospheric nitrogen). At the end of treatment, some bacteria are cycled back through the system, while most bacteria are burst open and collected as sludge.

Discharge Pipe—The point in the system where the plant is held most closely accountable through their NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) permit, which has limits for concentrations and volumes of discharge. While NC law allows penalties of up to $25,000/day for permit violations, CWFNC sees fines of only 2 to 4% of this amount, even for the worst chronic violators. Sadly, it’s usually cheaper to pay fines than to upgrade the plant. Call Gracia, at (828) 251-1291 to “Adopt a Permit,” if you’re concerned about a polluter near you!

Disinfection—Older wastewater plants still use chlorine to oxidize (chemically burn) bacteria and viruses, after filtering and removal of sludge, but updated ones use ozone or ultraviolet light which produce fewer toxic by-products, before treated water is discharged to stream.

Sludge—Semsolid materials left after wastewater treatment that are removed before treated water is discharged to surface water. Most municipal wastewater treatment plants contract with sludge hauling corporations to spread it on farmland or on their own land at higher rates than crops can use, threatening groundwater. Farmers are told that “bio-solids” are just free fertilizer, with analysis only for a few heavy metals (not for a huge array of industrial toxins), no inspections and no testing of soil or water pollution. Nearby residents report problems including terrible odors, particulates laced with bacteria, chronic respiratory problems and over-application causing contamination of streams and groundwater. CWFNC will hold a gathering in the fall to support communities challenging sludge corporations!

CWFNC
will hold a gathering in the fall to support communities challenging sludge corporations!
Plan to Log Asheville Watershed Sent Back to Drawing Board

The Asheville City Council has backed away from a management plan that would have opened the door to logging in the city-owned watershed. Bowing to pressure from citizens and a collective of local environmental and citizen action groups (the Asheville Watershed Working Group), the Council unanimously decided to scrap the expensive and ill-conceived management plan. Citizens and the AWWG effectively communicated their concerns and suggestions through a series of sign-on letters addressed to City Council, and raised awareness about the issues through guest editorials and letters to the editor. Council has directed the water department to develop a plan that is more realistic and the concerned citizens will continue to demand a voice in the decision-making process.

Canton Residents Take Measure of Blue Ridge Paper

Fed up with stinging eyes, sinus pain and other health problems, residents are stepping up efforts to improve air quality conditions near Blue Ridge Paper Products, the region's largest non-utility toxic emitter. With assistance from CWFNC and the School of Public Health (UNC-Chapel Hill), residents have begun monitoring hydrogen sulfide levels in the air near the paper mill. Preliminary results show just what Canton residents have known for years—emissions from the mill increase dramatically in the middle of the night and on weekends (when state regulators are not working). Data from the citizen monitoring show spikes in hydrogen sulfide emissions as high as 40ppb. Although the state “ambient air level” of 120ppb for hydrogen sulfide will soon be implemented (and pulp and paper mills wastewater systems are completely exempt from the standard), serious health affects have been reported at levels as low as 7ppb. The citizens have also initiated a campaign to raise awareness among local residents, informing them of the potential health impacts of paper mills and who they can call in the event of poor air quality.

Underground Storage Tank Contamination Subject of Major WXII TV Report

Winston-Salem—Low income neighbors of an underground fuel tank leak (the Bennett and Bailey site) have been working with CWFNC for years to keep focus on an efficient cleanup of contamination, full monitoring and working toward extension of water supply lines. On February 16, Harold Stanley and Dennis Wilkinson, who have lived next to tanks that leaked for forty or more years, were featured in a 5-minute investigative report on the contamination and the threat of over 13,000 operating fuel tank sites across the state to public and private wells throughout the state. Kelli Reed and Hope Taylor-Guevara of CWFNC were also shown calling for safe drinking water as a human right, including prompt notification of nearby pollution sites and an Emergency Drinking Water fund. See the Fall 2003 issue of Clean Currents for more details on this site. Visit our website at www.cwfnc.org for a link to Public Water Supply Section’s remarkable statewide map of drinking water potential contamination sources. Also check our website for details about our conference “Protecting Your Drinking Water at its Source” in Greensboro in May!
New Robeson County Group Challenges Stink of Campbell’s Soup Sprayfields

As we go to press, The Smith Township Families for Better Air and Water Quality has formed to stop the wastewater spraying of Campbell’s Soup from creating odors, water pollution and pest problems in their rural community. Billy Locklear, who contacted more than 200 households in the low income, mostly Native American community surrounding the sprayfields, says that he couldn’t stand the injustice any more. He wanted to help his neighbors speak out and make changes in Campbell’s operations. Folks attending the group’s first meeting report daily extreme odors due to spraying of wastewater from Campbell’s “star” southeastern processing facility, which handles vegetables, soups and also cans pork and beans on contract. Residents have to repeatedly wash clothes, keep windows closed and cancel outside barbecue gatherings. The strong odors are also affecting people’s ability to sleep, their appetites, and may be contributing to respiratory distress and asthma, while rats, mosquitos and flies attracted by the rotting food add to the health threats. Clean Water for NC staff, who will work with the Township Families to make Campbell’s Soup clean up their act, saw spray equipment operating in fields with standing water, causing pooling and runoff into miles of ditches continually full of filthy, stinking water.

Court Victory for Opponents of Navy Landing Field

Residents of Washington and Beaufort Counties are celebrating their freedom from immediate plans for land purchases, runway construction and extremely disruptive practice flights. The arguments of a coalition of conservation organizations cited by Judge Boyle (a highly controversial figure now being considered for a higher federal judicial appointment) focus on the failure of the Navy to meet the requirements of a “hard look” environmental assessment during its site selection process. Especially critical are the impacts on a major coastal bird flyway and sanctuary, as well as the impacts of the birds on safety of flights. From the perspective of the residents of the two low-income counties, however, the fight also involved major environmental justice issues. We send congratulations to the counties’ residents and officials committed to stopping the huge project in order to protect the right to live and farm in longstanding communities free of land loss, major noise and pollution, as well as the right to base their economic development on eco-tourism related to the bird sanctuary and other sustainably managed natural resources. Though the Navy could appeal the verdict, its OLF site is growing ever more embarrassingly political and expensive to pursue in northeastern NC.

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Europe’s Precautionary REACH Policy Scares US Polluters

European countries have been working on legislation since 1998 that will require industries to prove that chemicals being sold and produced in the EU are safe to use or handle. As in the U. S., the current system requires governments to prove that a chemical is dangerous before it can be banned. If passed, the legislation will send European chemical manufacturers scrambling for safety and health data on chemicals that have been marketed for years, but it could change the industry worldwide.

With hundreds of billions of dollars in trade and investments at stake, U.S. companies are lobbying hard to weaken the precautionary proposal. Some have even talked about suing the European Union in the World Trade Organization when the legislation is implemented.

Clearly, the EU represents a huge swath of the chemical industry, and this will have global implications," says Michael Walls, director of science policy with the American Chemistry Council, an industry trade group. REACH, which stands for Regulation, Evaluation, and Authorisation of Chemicals—will require registration of all substances that are produced or imported into the EU in quantities greater than 1 ton. Companies will also need authorization to sell and manufacture problem chemicals such as carcinogens, mutagens, and teratogens, as well as toxic chemicals that are long-lasting or bio-accumulate in the environment. Public Health and Environmental Justice groups are acclaiming this legislation as a potential major victory for a Precautionary Approach.

— information from Environmental Science and Technology

CA Victory for EJ and the Precautionary Approach—a Goal for NC!

After years of hard work by EJ activists in California, the state’s EPA recently agreed to use “cumulative impacts assessment” and a precautionary approach to guide their work. At first, these critical new definitions will guide agency efforts in pilot communities during 2005-06. Eventually, they will have much larger progress through new legislation and regulations protecting community health. The definitions are:

Cumulative Impacts: exposures or public health and environmental effects from combined emissions and discharges, in a geographic area including environmental pollution from all sources, whether single or multi-media, routinely, accidentally, or otherwise released.

Impacts: take into account sensitive populations and socioeconomic factors, when data is available.

Precautionary Approach: taking anticipatory action to protect public health or the environment if a reasonable threat of serious harm exists based upon the best available science and other relevant information, even if absolute and undisputed scientific evidence is not available to assess the exact nature and extent of risk.

The coalition of CA activists says, “We have a lot more work to do, but together we can do it! Si se Puede (Yes, we CAN)!”

— info from the Environmental Health Coalition, San Diego, CA

Spring Calendar of Clean Water & Justice Events!

March 18-19 (Fri. & Sat.) NC Conservation Network Annual Retreat at Brown Summit Conference Center north of Greensboro. Visit www.ncconservationnetwork.org or call (919) 857-4699 for details on last minute registration.

April 2 (Sat.) Full day training in benthic stream monitoring sponsored by the Western NC Stream Monitoring Information Exchange (coordinated by Gracia of CWFNC). Lunch and materials provided. No experience necessary and no charge, but the workshop is filling up fast!

April 2 Annual Martin Luther King Support for Labor Banquet, Wake County Office Park, Raleigh. 5:00 – 9:00 PM. Great music, inspiring speakers, and a wonderful opportunity to take solidarity with labor, environmental justice and health and safety allies.

April 6 (Wed.) Clean Water Lobby Day. Join us for full day of lobbying with other grassroots advocates for clean, safe water. No experience needed. Sign up today!

April 16 (Sat.) Human Race and Asheville Earth Day. Volunteers needed to help with tabling and outreach!

April 16 NC Environmental Justice Network’s 2nd Quarterly Communities Meeting. All communities invited to network on your issues. Cool Springs Baptist Church, Gaston, off I-95 near Roanoke Rapids. Call Belinda Joyner at 252-537-1078 for more information.

April 23 (Sat.) Earth Day! Volunteers needed to help with tabling and outreach in Sylva and Durham!

May 7 (Sat.) CWFNC Quarterly Board meeting, 11:00 AM at Dan Nicholas Park in Salisbury. All members are welcome to join us for meeting, lunch, stream monitoring and recreational activities.

May 14 (Sat.) “Protecting Your Drinking Water at its Source”, “Protecting meeting in Greensboro, UNC-G. A full day of workshops on strategies with local and regional water activists, state experts, public health and environmental officials. Co-sponsored by CWFNC, Guilford County Health Dept., UNC-G and the NC Rural Communities Assistance Project.

May 14-21 National River Clean up Week on the Yadkin River. Great outdoor Provision Co. will provide free canoes for the fist 20 people to volunteer for each day, Monday, May 16th through Friday, May 20th. Contact Montie Hamby, Yadkin River Trails Assoc., at (336) 659-0956 for more info.

For more info or to rsvp for the events listed, contact...

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Thanks to Our 2004 Foundation Partners and Major Donors for their Generous Support!

- Environmental Support Center
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- New Leaf Fund of the Community Foundation of WNC
- Norman Foundation
- Patagonia
- Pigeon River Fund of the Community Foundation of WNC
- Brad Stanback and Shelli Lodge-Stanback
- Fred and Alice Stanback
- Edna and Walter Staton
- Richard and Shauney Weisler

Thank you to recent new and renewing members who make our work possible!


Thanks to our fabulous volunteers for helping fill orders for lead testing kits and prepare for our Board retreat!

Molly Craven, Erin Foy, Toby Heaton and Cathy Holt

Here’s an easy way to support Clean Water for North Carolina!

Visit www.cwfnc.org and click on the “Donate!” button for secure on-line giving.

Join CleanWater for North Carolina
(or renew your membership!)

- Here’s my donation to join or renew my CWFNC membership__________.
- I would like to volunteer, contact me.

Name _____________________________________________________
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(Email is a faster and cheaper way for us to reach you.)

Make your check payable to:
Clean Water for North Carolina
and send to: 29½ Page Avenue
Asheville, NC 28801

Reports currently available

- Citizens Toolkit for Protecting Your Environmental Rights - $5
- Unequal Water Justice Contaminated Wells and Environmental Justice by Kelli Reid - $2.50
- Chemical Security in North Carolina by Bill McCloy - $2

All of the above reports are FREE on request to CWFNC members.

Order by check made payable to CWFNC and mail to:
29½ Page Avenue • Asheville, NC 28801
or request when you join or rejoin!
Want to help protect local rivers and streams?
Learn to identify aquatic insects and help protect western NC’s waterways by becoming a stream monitoring volunteer!

Training is Saturday, April 2nd at Haywood Community College from 9am-5pm

To RSVP or for more information contact Gracia O’Neill at (828) 251-1291

This newsletter is printed on 80% post-consumer, processed chlorine free paper.

Join the Clean Water Lobby Day 2005 grassroots lobby team!

WHEN: Wednesday, April 6th, from about 10AM to 3PM
WHERE: NC General Assembly in Raleigh.
Advocate with state legislators in your region for:
• stronger enforcement of our laws to protect clean water
• safe drinking water as a human right for all North Carolinians!

To find out more about lobby issues and transportation options, please contact:
In western NC, Gracia, at (828) 251-1291, or gracia@cwfnc.org
In central and eastern NC, Hope, at (919) 401-9600, or hope@cwfnc.org

Spring Clean Water & Justice Events
See Inside for Details!