

# SEJ Journal

The Quarterly Publication of the Society of Environmental Journalists

Vol. 16 No. 4

## TRI tension Pollution database is imperfect, but a great source

By JAMES BRUGGERS

What began 18 years ago as a tedious new way to find out about pollution has become an indispensable tool for journalists – one now under threat of being rendered less useful.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Toxics Release Inventory is the first place a reporter, editor or news producer can go to find out how much pollution comes from an industrial facility. Or is generated in a zip code, a county, a state or the entire nation.

It's also a place where journalists can track trends – though that can be harder because the rules on what facilities must report have changed over the years. And while there are gaps – the facilities don't have to report all their pollution to the inventory – journalists and the communities they serve would be far more ignorant had Congress not required TRI in 1986 and had the EPA not done such a good job of putting the information on the Internet in the 1990s.

The threat to the database comes from the EPA, and has been closely tracked by SEJ's First Amendment Task Force. In the name of "burden reduction," EPA last year proposed to cut back on some of what it requires companies to report each year. It also told Congress it might move to every-other-year reporting. Congress subsequently put a temporary halt on the first proposal. The second proposal is still floating out there, though both are perhaps less likely given the new Democratic majority in Congress. SEJ submitted formal objections to the proposed changes

Given the recent tension over TRI, I was asked to be on a panel at the SEJ conference in Burlington, and to talk about how journalists use the database. I discovered a reporting trail rich in history and current application.

One of the first stories based on TRI appeared in *The (Louisville) Courier-Journal* on Sunday, Nov. 27, 1988, by Scott Thurm, who

now covers Silicon Valley for *The Wall Street Journal*. The head-

*(Continued on page 19)*

### More on reporting on toxics

TRI cutbacks: page 21

Analyzing state data: page 16

### Inside Story:

## Top e-beat reporter: Make readers regain curiosity

By MIKE DUNNE

Marla Cone says she had no special knowledge to become a science and environment writer. But with a sense of curiosity and an eye for a good story, she has excelled on the environment beat.

What little she remembers of high school chemistry is "Fe" is iron – and that's because of a comic book character. But today she routinely writes stories for the *Los Angeles Times* about the impacts of chemicals on environmental health, work that won her the 2006 Society of Environmental Journalists beat reporting award.

In one story, Cone explained to readers how scientists now believe that Parkinson's disease, a serious neurological disorder, is linked to exposure to pesticides and other chemicals in the environment.

"With her knack for explanatory journalism, she translated complex science into terms that readers can understand, without falling into the traps of hype or oversimplification," said the

newspaper's contest nomination letter. "Her piece on Parkinson's was commended by scientists and helped bring attention to research in the environmental causes of the disease."

She also wrote about the European Union's requirements for more research and regulation of chemicals to protect the public from exposures and how that was affecting U.S. businesses with international sales.

Other stories in her award-winning portfolio included:

- How the pesticide methyl iodide, which is being considered as a replacement for ozone-depleting chemicals, poses its own problems.

- How traces of prescription drugs are being found in aquifers in California's San Gabriel Valley due to treated sewage effluent being used to recharge groundwater.

- How sewage effluent plumes were altering the sexual characteristics of fish off the California coast.

*(Continued on page 22)*

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# In this mixed-up media world, we need to keep SEJ well

By **TIM WHEELER**

I didn't really know what to expect when I flew out to Colorado in the fall of 1991 for the premiere conference of a new group called the Society of Environmental Journalists. As the first-ever environmental beat reporter for the afternoon newspaper in Baltimore, I hoped to pick up some story ideas and background on complicated pollution issues. I also hoped it wouldn't be a waste of time and money.

It wasn't. From the opening workshop on toxicology to the post-conference hike in the mountains with newfound friends, I was blown away by this congregation of journalists from all over the country who shared my passion for covering the environment. We swapped war stories, tips and phone numbers. I returned home re-energized – and hooked on SEJ.

Fifteen years later, it's my privilege now to serve as SEJ's president. I'm thrilled – and sobered, because it's a challenging time to be in journalism.

The "mainstream" news media are in crisis, with newsroom job cuts seemingly being announced almost weekly. Knight Ridder Inc., one of the titans of newspaper publishing, has been sold and partially broken up. Tribune Co., the large multimedia corporation for which I work, may join the latest industry craze to "go private," selling off some of its broadcast stations and newspapers in the process.

The media landscape is changing so fast it's tempting to want to crawl into a hole or run away, to avoid being hit as the "dead trees" sag and fall. But we journalists are a resilient, if cranky, lot. Despite the turmoil, many have managed to hang on as full-time environmental reporters, while others of us have adapted by changing beats, jobs, or even media to keep covering at least some aspect of the environment.

That's because for all the seismic shifts in the news business, one thing hasn't changed. The need is still there – arguably greater than ever – for good reporting on complicated and controversial topics such as climate change, energy and suburban sprawl. It's no exaggeration to say stories like these really matter – affecting where, how and maybe even whether we live in the 21st century.

SEJ is still there, too, working to help reporters get such stories, get them right and get them out to the reading, listening, viewing, blogging public. Membership has grown over the years to 1,300. Conference also has swelled, from 250 in Boulder to more than 800

last fall in Burlington, Vt. – remarkable, when you consider how newsroom staffing has declined.

Volunteers and staff are already hard at work preparing for our next annual conference, hosted by Stanford University in September in Palo Alto, Calif. Climate and energy-efficiency research, sustainable agriculture and marine-species protection promise to be on the agenda in the Bay area, with Silicon Valley and wine country nearby. Mark your calendars now for Sept. 5-9.

Meanwhile, in the coming year, we hope to give SEJ's Web site a makeover, updating its appearance, making it easier to use and enhancing its content. During the Burlington conference, the website for the first time carried daily coverage for those who could not be there, with written reports and audio downloads of key sessions. And we were treated to an extraordinary, unofficial blog launched by online media maven Amy Gahrn, which enabled attendees to weigh in with their own views and experiences. That's the kind of vibrant, inclusive Web presence we hope to have year-round, not just around annual conferences.

The editorial board of *SEJournal* also is looking to give our quarterly newsletter a facelift. And we're working hard now, in partnership with other groups, to defend the rights of journalists and the public to know how government is handling contentious issues of pollution and management of natural resources and public lands. To name just a few of SEJ's efforts.

Uncertain as the future is for the news media, though, it's also challenging for nonprofit organizations. SEJ depends for the vast majority of its funding on foundation grants. Though we've done quite well over the years, thanks to the savvy and skill of our executive director, Beth Parke, it's a tightrope act. One missed major grant could force a serious belt-tightening at SEJ, curtailing many of the services we offer to members and to journalists at large.

SEJ's board and staff are working to diversify the organization's financial support, while hewing to our longstanding policy of not seeking or accepting grants from non-media corporations, government agencies or environmental groups. We're also building in a financial safety net, the 21st Century Fund. That's our endowment, to keep SEJ from a hard landing should we miss a step on the foundation tightrope. We've managed to raise more than \$125,000 in the last few years – a solid start, but still a long way from our ultimate goal of having enough socked away – \$3 million to \$5 million – to generate significant, sustainable interest income.

Now, amid all the challenges we're facing, we have one that presents a golden opportunity. In the fall, SEJ received a challenge grant enabling us to more than double our endowment in a single year. The grant is being offered by the Challenge Fund for Journalism, a collaboration of the Ford Foundation, the Ethics

(Continued on page 28)

## Report from the Society's President



By  
**Timothy  
Wheeler**

### Correction

The Fall '06 edition of *SEJournal* carried a report on the Environmental Journalism Summit in New York City in July 2006. It described a journalist who prepared a report on a north Florida survivalist who was living off the electricity grid. That journalist who related that story was Peter Dysktra of CNN, not Bill Blakemore of ABC News, as the report indicated.

# SEJournal

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SEJournal is available online at [www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org).

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## SEJournal submission deadlines

- Spring 2007.....February 1, 2007
- Summer 2007.....May 1, 2007
- Fall 2007.....August 1, 2007
- Winter 2007.....November 1, 2007





# SEJ conference draws near-record crowd to Vermont

More than 800 journalists, academics, students and others attended SEJ's 16th annual conference in Burlington, Vermont, Oct. 25-29. That makes the Vermont conference SEJ's second largest in attendance.

Beth Parke, SEJ's executive director, said the conference sponsored by the University of Vermont and Vermont Law

and Justice School, saw a "marked increase in attendance of journalism students. It was encouraging."

Many participants posted to blogs and websites daily reports on SEJ events and moments. You could almost smell the *hors d'oeuvres* on their breath with the postings. Here's a few of their reports. Complete stories of the following blog quotes can be found at their respective websites:

"First night at the SEJ Conference, and things started off with a small bang as representatives from several major auto manufac-

urers – all men – took the stage for a panel discussion about alternative fuel vehicles, moderated by Jim Motavalli, editor of *E/The Environmental Magazine*. Also speaking was one lone woman – representing the ethanol promotion board." By Sarah Pullman ([www.desmogblog.com/cornering-ford-at-sej2006](http://www.desmogblog.com/cornering-ford-at-sej2006))

"Everybody knows that people are engaged in multiple ways, one of which is through visuals. In this super-busy world, journalists must catch the reader's attention even faster than ever before. One of the most efficient ways of doing this is using graphics in your story telling. The session I attended, Visualizing Stories: Moving Beyond Words When Covering the Environment, covered all the basics that journalists need to know when using visuals in their stories." By Jessica A. Knoblauch (<http://agahran.typepad.com/sej2006/>)

"One of the more serendipitous aspects of the network lunch gatherings was the impromptu appearance by Peter Singer at the discussion on 'Animal Rights: Where Creatures, Ecosystems, and Societies Collide.' Singer, a professor of bioethics at Princeton and at the University of Melbourne, is perhaps the leading thinker in the field of animal rights, so having him at the table was a little like a group of high school science students having a sitdown with Steven Hawking." By A. Adam Glenn (<http://agahran.typepad.com/sej2006/>)

On Friday's opening plenary, Corporate Green: "70 percent. That's how much of a reduction in the use of fossil fuels is needed to stabilize the earth's climate," said Bill McKibben, who was perhaps the first journalist to sound the alarm on climate change with his 1989 book, 'The End of Nature.' While representatives of Wal-Mart, Coca Cola and DuPont touted their environmental initiatives, which are substantial, McKibben this morning told several hundred people at the SEJ conference it won't be enough. It was a lively discussion, and an important one, too – because of the central and powerful role business plays in our society." By Jim Bruggers ([www.courier-journal.com/blogs/bruggers/2006/10/corporate-green.html](http://www.courier-journal.com/blogs/bruggers/2006/10/corporate-green.html))

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Photo courtesy of JOSEPH A. DAVIS



**SEJers looked out over now-closed GE capacitor plant at Hudson Falls, NY., which poured PCBs into the Hudson River.**

and Justice School, saw a "marked increase in attendance of journalism students. It was encouraging."

Many participants posted to blogs and websites daily reports on SEJ events and moments. You could almost smell the *hors d'oeuvres* on their breath with the postings. Here's a few of their reports. Complete stories of the following blog quotes can be found at their respective websites:

"First night at the SEJ Conference, and things started off with a small bang as representatives from several major auto manufac-

## Almost as good as being there: Conference MP3s and more online!

Audios, videos, stories and photos of select conference sessions are now available online at [www.sej.org/confer/index7.htm](http://www.sej.org/confer/index7.htm)

### Wednesday, October 25

- The "Real Scoop" on Vermont: Keynote Speaker Ben Cohen Mixes Cookies and Ice Cream
- News and Announcements: Awards winners, Vermont Public Radio podcast, TVWeek.com pre-conference stories

### Thursday, October 26

- A Tale of Two Tours: From Camel's Hump to Cow Power: SEJ Tours Probe the Issues

### Friday, October 27

- Breakfast Session: The Biggest Story, the Biggest Challenge: Capturing Climate Change
- Opening Plenary: Corporate Green
- Concurrent Sessions 1: THE NATION: Conflicted Science: History and Present Problems

- Evening Plenary: And Now a Word from Our Critics...

### Saturday, October 28

- Breakfast Session: Covering the Big Stories: Up a Creek, Without a News Hook
- Concurrent Sessions 3: THE FUTURE: Global Warming: Reporting on What's Going to Be Changing in Your Backyard
- Concurrent Sessions 4: THE FUTURE: The Future of Farming: Can Traditional Crop and Livestock Farming Be Sustained?
- Lunch Plenary: Government Secrecy: What We Don't Know Can't...

### Sunday, October 29

- Morning Session 1: Looking Forward, Looking Back
- Morning Session 2: Nature Writers: A Breakfast Café
- From the Post-Conference Tour: The Wild, Wild East

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# SEJ annual awards 2006: Winners!

The Society of Environmental Journalists announced the winners of its annual Awards for Reporting on the Environment. The nine winning entries received \$1,000 and a trophy. Another 16 entries received second- or third-place certificates. SEJ's contest is the largest and most comprehensive in the world for journalism on environmental topics. This year it attracted almost 200 entries.

The fifth annual contest recognized outstanding environmental journalism in four print categories (explanatory, investigative, beat and small-market), four broadcast categories (large- and small-market radio and television) and online journalism. Next year, SEJ plans to add a tenth category honoring the best environmental journalism produced by students.

Judging panels of distinguished reporters, editors and journalism educators selected the winning stories, all of which were published or broadcast between March 2005 and February 2006.

Details and links to winning entries are available at [www.sej.org/contest/index4.htm](http://www.sej.org/contest/index4.htm)

And the winners, listed alphabetically by category, are...

## **Kevin Carmody Award For Outstanding Investigative Reporting, Print**

### **1st Place:**

"Vanishing Wetlands" – *St. Petersburg Times*. Craig Pittman and Matthew Waite.

The judges wrote, "This pair of reporters tracked down former employees and unearthed internal documents that revealed a 24-year pattern of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers catering to developers instead of upholding its legal duty to protect marshes and swamps needed for flood protections, to filter pollution and preserve wildlife."

### **2nd Place:**

"Toxic Legacy" – *The Record* of Bergen County, NJ. Jan Barry, Alex Nussbaum, Mary Jo Layton, Lindy Washburn, Tom Troncone, Thomas E. Franklin, Barbara Williams, Debra Lynn Vial, and Tim Nostrand.

### **3rd Place:**

"Toxic Traces: New Questions About Old Chemicals" – *The Wall Street Journal*. Peter Waldman.

## **Outstanding Beat Reporting, Print**

### **1st Place:**

Environmental Science and Health – *Los Angeles Times*. Marla Cone.

The judges wrote that her stories "exemplify the best of environmental beat reporting. Simply, directly, and without straying into alarmism, Cone offers a broad perspective of the health impacts that unexpected chemical contamination imposes on humans and animals."

### **2nd Place:**

South Texas Environment Beat – *San Antonio Express-News*. Anton Caputo.

### **3rd Place:**

Environmental Beat, from Drilling to Teflon – *The Baltimore Sun*. Tom Pelton.

## **Outstanding Explanatory Reporting, Print**

### **1st Place:**

"The Climate of Man" – *The New Yorker*. Elizabeth Kolbert.

The judges wrote that Kolbert "peppered her fine narratives with anecdotes that put a human face on what is a highly complex topic. The result: a compelling and convincing account of what is clearly one of the most pressing issues facing humanity."

### **2nd Place:**

"Blue Smoke, Tainted Water" – *The Columbus Dispatch*. Spencer Hunt.

### **3rd Place:**

"A Body's Burden: Our Chemical Legacy" – *Oakland Tribune*. Douglas Fischer.

## **Outstanding Online Reporting**

### **1st Place:**

"Fantastic Forests: The Balance of Nature and People of Madagascar" – *WBUR.org*. Daniel Grossman.

The judges wrote that Grossman's work "shows off the best of web storytelling and an explanation of a far-off place."

### **2nd Place:**

"Integrity in Science" – *Environmental Science & Technology Online*. Paul D. Thacker.

## **Outstanding Radio Reporting, Large Market**

### **1st Place:**

"Borderlands" – NPR's Living on Earth. Molly Peterson.

The judges called Peterson's stories "a vivid journey to the Mexican border that more than does justice to an under-reported story."

### **2nd Place:**

"Bioko's Endangered Monkeys" – PRI's The World. David Baron.

### **3rd Place:**

DuPont stories – NPR's Living on Earth. Jeff Young.

## **Outstanding Radio Reporting, Small Market**

### **1st Place:**

"Dirty Dealings at Maine's DEP" – Maine Public Broadcasting Network (WMEA Portland). Susan P. Sharon.

The judges noted that Sharon's reporting led to the firing of the chief of the state Department of Environmental Protection, and said she "got the important players on the record and held their feet to the fire."

### **2nd Place:**

"Poultry Antibiotics" – NET Radio (Nebraska's public radio network). Sarah McCammon.

### **Honorable Mention:**

"Eugenie Clark" – WGPU Public Radio, Fort Myers, FL. Amy Tardif.

## **Outstanding Small Market Reporting, Print**

### **1st Place:**

"Our Changing World: Understanding the Science of Climate Change" – *Bangor Daily News*. Misty Edgecomb, Jonathan Ferland, Eric Zelz, Scott Haskell, Rick Levasseur, Brian Robitaille, Becky Bowden, Greg McManus, Charlie Campo, John Clark Russ and Janet Sargent.

(Continued on page 18)





## Vermont... (from page 4)

“The problem: 1.6 billion people in the world don’t have access to clean water, and 1.2 billion people don’t have clean water to drink. Dean Kamen, the inventor of the Segway, told the SEJ con-

ferentiate the irony. It was the first day of the Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) conference in Burlington, Vermont, and we were here to see first hand what the company is doing to remove the PCBs that, for 30 years, it had discharged into the Hudson River.” By Jennifer Bogo ([www.popularmechanics.com/blogs/science\\_news/4200528.html](http://www.popularmechanics.com/blogs/science_news/4200528.html))

Photo courtesy of BRUCE RITCHIE



**The Adirondack Mountains seen from Heaven Hill Farm on the second day of the SEJ post-conference tour. Area residents said as much as 20 inches of snow fell in some parts of the Adirondack Park during the tour’s first night.**

ference this morning he is working on the solution: ‘little boxes’ – one that easily purifies water without much maintenance, the other that can turn just about any kind of fuel, including cow dung, into power.” By Jim Bruggers ([www.courier-journal.com/blogs/bruggers/2006/10/cow-pie-in-sky-idea-maybe-not.html](http://www.courier-journal.com/blogs/bruggers/2006/10/cow-pie-in-sky-idea-maybe-not.html))

On the Hudson River Tour: “When I walked into GE’s water treatment plant in Hudson Falls, N.Y., past enormous 10,000 gallon tanks labeled ‘sludge conditioning,’ ‘backwater holding’ and ‘effluent,’ I was still groggy from four hours of sleep and a three-hour bus ride. But as I took my seat under a big green sign printed in friendly cursive letters ‘Safety First,’ I wasn’t too tired to appre-

ciate the irony. It was the first day of the Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) conference in Burlington, Vermont, and we were here to see first hand what the company is doing to remove the PCBs that, for 30 years, it had discharged into the Hudson River.” By Jennifer Bogo ([www.popularmechanics.com/blogs/science\\_news/4200528.html](http://www.popularmechanics.com/blogs/science_news/4200528.html))

On the Lake Champlain Tour: “The Ecosystem at Risk Tour event was highly interesting and great fun, which is the best combination in my opinion. We started out viewing various methods for slowing down and retaining storm water runoff. We toured the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum ..... (and) attended a lakeside lecture (which included) a movie of underwater shipwrecks in Lake Champlain. UVM’s Mary Watzin held forth on a variety of environmental topics as we headed out, pointing to many features land-side, and describing their impact to Lake Champlain’s health. I returned to the Sheraton with a renewed appreciation for the many systems, problems and people involved with Lake Champlain water issues. The sheer beauty of the lake inspires and challenges me to continue learning about water issues that impact my own nearby Great Lakes and waterways.” By Madison Hall (<http://agahran.typepad.com/sej2006/>)

“What I learned about the Friday evening session (critique of SEJ members’ reporting on climate change) with Marc Morano, who is the Karl Rove for Oklahoma Sen. James Inhofe, the man who calls climate change a hoax, is the cynicism that this Washington political operative relayed. I don’t think he’s alone, nor do I think his M.O. is confined to the Republican Party. But his argument was personal – personal attacks on journalists, and personal attacks on NASA climate scientist James Hansen, who was in the audience and who in another panel was described as a future Nobel Prize winner.”

Check out this hot debate at <http://www.sej.org/confer/burl/multimedia/Critics.mp3>.

## SEJ board elects new officers at conference meeting

The Society of Environmental Journalists elected new board leadership Oct. 27, 2006, during its 16th Annual Conference in Burlington, Vt.

Tim Wheeler, growth reporter for *The Baltimore Sun*, was elected SEJ president. Wheeler, a reporter and editor for 30 years and serving on the board since 2001, replaces Perry Beeman of *The Des Moines Register*, who served as president from 2004 - 2006. Beeman will continue to serve SEJ as a board member.

The other members of the executive committee include:

- Christy George, Oregon Public Broadcasting: Vice President for Programs
- Cheryl Hogue, *Chemical & Engineering News* in Washington, D.C.: Vice President for Membership

- Dina Cappiello, *Houston Chronicle*: Secretary

- Carolyn Whetzel, The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc.: Treasurer

SEJ members also re-elected several board members and added a new member to the board, all for three-year terms. Besides Cappiello and George, Robert McClure of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Don Hopey of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and Jim Bruggers of *The Louisville Courier-Journal* all won re-election. Jeff Burnside, a special projects reporter for the NBC-owned station WTVJ in Miami, was elected to the board for the first time, replacing Vince Patton of KGW-TV in Portland. Rebecca Daugherty, an independent journalist who represents the 186 SEJ associate members, was elected to a three-year term in the associate-member board seat.





# Books, awards, distinguish environment writers across US

By JACKLEEN DE LA HARPE

**Cynthia Barnett's** first book, "Mirage: Florida and the Vanishing Water of the Eastern U.S.," will be published in March 2007 (University of Michigan Press.) Part investigative reporting, part environmental history, "Mirage" tells how the eastern half of the nation has squandered its fresh water and now faces shortages and conflicts once unique to the arid West. Florida's parched swamps and sprawling subdivisions set the stage for a look at water-supply issues facing America and the globe: water wars, the politics of development, inequities in the price of water, the bottled-water industry, privatization, and new-water-supply schemes. Barnett, a reporter for *Florida Trend* magazine, started "Mirage" in 2000 as a part-time master's student in environmental history and says she couldn't have completed it without her Knight-Wallace fellowship at the University of Michigan in 2005.

**David Baron**, health and science editor, *The World*, reports that *The World* earned two big honors, the duPont-Columbia Award and the Scripps Howard Foundation National Journalism Award for a series he edited, "The Global Race for Stem Cell Therapies." *The World* also won the 2006 American Society for Microbiology Communications Award for a series that he oversaw, "The Forgotten Plague: Malaria." Baron writes that "having recently made the switch from reporter to editor, it's extremely satisfying to work with such a talented team of correspondents, and it's great to see their hard work recognized."

**Elizabeth Bluemink**, a natural resources reporter for the *Juneau Empire*, has been hired at the *Anchorage Daily News* and will cover mining, logging, Native corporations, and the Alaska tourism industry. Bluemink is a member of the *SEJournal* editorial board.

**Chris Burnett** is the co-author of a book, "Newswriter's Handbook", an introductory journalism text that explains to students how to report and write news stories (Blackwell Publishing Co.). He recently received the 2006 Charles Redd Award for the Best Paper on the Politics of the American West from the Western Political Science Association. The paper titled "Wildlife Policy in California and Colorado: A Punctuated Equilibrium Model Explanation," uses the case study method to explain the role ballot initiative campaigns can play in achieving dramatic change in wildlife policy.

Freelance writer **John S. Manuel Jr.** has published "The Canoeist" (Jefferson Press), a memoir that takes the reader on a suspense-filled journey down a dozen North American rivers at different stages in the author's life. The book has received excellent reviews in *Paddler* and *Canoe & Kayak* magazines.

**Sheryl De Vore** was named one of three Suburban Journalists of the Year by Suburban Newspapers of America. She came in first in the United States and second in North America.

**Krestia DeGeorge** of *City Newspaper*, Rochester, N.Y., won the Connye Miller Award for Media Reporting, presented by the

Association of Alternative Newsweeklies.

**Marianne Rahn-Erickson** was part of a production team that received the 2006 Gracie Allen Award from The Foundation of American Women in Radio and Television for Outstanding Special Program for "Her Story-Women of Science." The 26-part series, which she co-wrote and co-produced with Mary Darcy at Northeast Public Radio/WAMC's National Productions, told the stories behind relatively obscure women in science. The series played on 51%, WAMC's weekly radio show, and was distributed on PRI.

## Media on the Move

**Kathie Florsheim**, freelance photographer based in Providence, R.I., will exhibit her photographs in a show, "On the Edge," at the Newport Art Museum in Newport through Jan. 10, 2007. The documentary photographs

explore the intersection between the man-made and the natural environment at the New England coastline by looking at the area from three vantage points: What does the seasonal use of the land look like? How is the coast accessed, both physically and visually? How has the development of the land configured the space?

**Eric Freedman's** book, "John F. Kennedy In His Own Words" (Citadel), has been published. Written with co-author **Edward Hoffman**, the book draws from speeches, diaries, correspondence, books and conversations to explore a broad range of Kennedy's thinking on issues including racism, religion, peace and war.

**Peter Friederici**, assistant professor of journalism at Northern Arizona University, has published "Nature's Restoration: People and Places on the Front Lines of Conservation" (Island Press). Excerpted in *Audubon* and *Orion*, the book profiles the burgeoning ecological restoration movement across North America and shows how the practice of restoration touches on politics, economics, and how people view and interact with nature.

**Sharon Friedman** has been appointed associate dean for faculty and staff for the College of Arts and Sciences at Lehigh University. Friedman is a professor of journalism and communication and director of the Science and Environmental Writing Program. She received the Hillman Faculty Award in 2006 given for outstanding teaching, research and service.

**Mary Grady**, a freelancer in Providence, R.I., is writing a daily blog on ecotravel for Boots'nAll, a website based in Oregon that caters to independent and adventurous travelers ([www.ecotravelogue.com/](http://www.ecotravelogue.com/)) and has launched a half-dozen new blogs on travel themes. Grady writes that ideas about great places to go, or ecotourism and sustainable travel in general, are welcome. Contact: [marygrady@cox.net](mailto:marygrady@cox.net).

**Daniel Hendrick**, editor in chief of the *Queens Chronicle*, wrote his first book, "Jamaica Bay," to be released in October by Arcadia Publishing. The book is a collection of photographs and historical documents that describes the bay since European settlement. The last chapter focuses on the environmental consequences of massive alterations to the bay, which nearly halved in size over the 20th century. Jamaica Bay is ringed by the New

*(Continued next page)*



## MOTM... (from page 7)

York City boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens; its once-expansive salt marshes are drowning so quickly that scientists predict they will disappear entirely by 2020 without intervention.

**Thomas B. Henry** was awarded the media award from the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition. Henry was given the award for “consistently penetrating and in-depth coverage of the challenges facing the Great Lakes.” He also won a 2006 Vermont Law School Fellowship, where he studied the legal history of nuclear power with Peter Bradford, one of five commissioners who ran the Nuclear Regulatory Commission during the 50 percent meltdown of the Three Mile Island Unit 2 reactor in 1979. While at VLS, Henry also gave a speech on accountability in the nuclear industry and the NRC (or lack thereof) from his perspective of covering the 2002 near-rupture of the Davis-Besse reactor head, which the NRC has described as the greatest safety problem it and the nuclear industry has encountered since Three Mile Island.

**Wendee Holtcamp** won first place in the 2006 International Regional Magazine Association (IRMA) Competition for best nature feature, “Save the Monkeyface!” published in *Texas Parks & Wildlife Magazine*, April 2006. She also wrote “Kissing Cousins: Breeding with their introduced relatives threatens to drive Guadalupe bass to extinction” in the Oct. 2006 *Texas Parks & Wildlife Magazine*.

**Jeff Kart**, environmental reporter, *The Bay City Times* (Michigan), won a first place award for news from the Michigan Press Association for a two-part series he wrote on high asthma levels and low air quality in the Saginaw Valley.

**Ed Kanze** writes that his latest book, “Over The Mountain and Home Again: Journeys of an Adirondack Naturalist” was published in July 2006 by Nicholas K. Burns Publishing, a small press specializing in New York State and Adirondack books. The reviews have been kind, he writes, especially one from Phil Terrie, director of the Center for American Culture Studies at Bowling Green State in Ohio, who called Kanze an “Adirondack Thoreau.”

LSU Press has published “America’s Wetland: Louisiana’s Vanishing Coast,” a coffee-table book featuring the photos of SEJ members **Bevil Knapp** and writer **Mike Dunne**. Knapp is a freelance photographer in the New Orleans area and Dunne is a reporter for *The Advocate* in Baton Rouge. The book was prepared before Hurricane Katrina hit southeastern Louisiana. Several areas

featured in the book were later destroyed or flooded by Katrina and Hurricane Rita. A chapter on New Orleans was prophetically entitled “America’s Atlantis,” and explained the loss of wetlands could help flood New Orleans during a Category 3 hurricane. It said the city could become “the site of the nation’s worst natural disaster.” The book was printed right before Katrina hit.

**Tim Knight**, a new SEJ member, has completed his Canada-South Africa international television co-production trilogy, “Inside Noah’s Ark.” The three-hour program tells the story of how wildlife reserves are no longer truly wild. He is still training working broadcast journalists internationally, but in a radical change from chasing lions in the Kalahari Desert he’s signed on with Wilfred Laurier University in Ontario for 12 lectures on the social impact of documentaries.

**Deb Krol** has been accepted for a one-year Diversity Leadership Outreach Grant from the Society of Professional Journalists. She writes that it is similar to SEJ’s fellowships for journalists of color; grantees receive leadership training, mentoring by SPJ leaders, and travel and registration for the convention.

**John Charles Kunich**, associate professor of law, Appalachian School of Law, writes that his new book, “Killing Our Oceans: Dealing with the Mass Extinction of Marine Life,” is the follow-up to his American Library Association Award-winning book, “Ark of the Broken Covenant: Protecting the World’s Biodiversity Hotspots.” Both books, he writes, include information about the mass extinction now threatening life on Earth.

**Meaghan Parker** wrote that *The Environmental Change and Security Program Report*, a journal that she edits, was recently named “Best Population Journal” by the Population Institute. The award was given to journalists and communicators who have made outstanding contributions to greater awareness of population, environment, and resource issues. ([www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic\\_id=1413&fuseaction=topics.item&news\\_id=206512](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1413&fuseaction=topics.item&news_id=206512))

**Craig Pittman** writes that “Vanishing Wetlands,” a series in *St. Petersburg Times* that he wrote with Matthew Waite, won the Waldo Proffitt Award for Excellence in Environmental Journalism in Florida and third place in the 2005 Philip Meyer Awards. The series focused on the rapidly disappearing wetlands of Florida and the agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, that

(Continued on page 24)

## Dale Willman recognized for volunteer service to SEJ

The Society of Environmental Journalist’s Stolberg Meritorious Service Award was presented at SEJ’s 16th annual conference in Burlington, Vt., to Dale Willman, who in nine years as a member has proven himself indispensable with the variety of volunteer tasks he has performed at the organization’s annual meetings.

Whether operating the PowerPoint at the awards ceremony, taping sessions or moderating them, Dale has been a go-to volunteer. His volunteer duties have included serving as both a judge and committee member for SEJ’s environmental reporting awards.

Dale “has been lurking around for years at the conferences, waiting to be helpful,” Chris Rigel, SEJ’s associate director said. “He’s always there, always extremely helpful.”

This year, Willman tackled one of the conference’s most

difficult assignments – organizing a three-day post-conference tour of the Adirondacks.

Willman is an award-winning radio correspondent and editor who now is executive editor of his own nonprofit multimedia reporting company, Field Notes Productions. He also teaches and lectures at colleges, and still finds time for volunteer community work in his hometown of Saratoga Springs, NY.

The annual award honors exceptional volunteer work by an SEJ member. It was created by the SEJ board in 1998 and named in honor of SEJ founder David Stolberg, who had a 38-year career with Scripps Howard that included duties for the Scripps Howard Foundation’s annual Meeman Awards for excellence in environmental reporting. He first conceived of an organization like SEJ.



# Media ill-prepared for disaster and failing in warming reports

By JAN KNIGHT

*Newspapers unprepared to cover public health crises, survey suggests*

U.S. newspapers and reporters are largely unprepared to cover public health emergencies related to contemporary risks such as toxic waste leaks, bio-terrorism and avian flu, according to a recent study.

In a survey of news managers representing 164 dailies in 14 southern states, researchers found that only seven newspapers offered training for health emergency reporting and only 25 had formal plans for covering such events. The researchers were surprised to find that even newspapers in counties with toxic waste and Superfund sites were unprepared to cover related potential health disasters.

Less than 60 percent of the newspapers had a reporter on staff specializing in medicine, health or science coverage and less than 50 percent had a public health beat, the researchers found. About half of the respondents said their reporters possessed sufficient knowledge to cover public health threats, but only 14 percent said their reporting staffs possessed enough scientific knowledge to cover hazards such as bio-terrorism and infectious diseases.

University of Alabama researchers, with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Southern Newspaper Publishers Association (SNPA), distributed the survey to 450 newspaper SNPA members in December 2004. A total of 164 surveys were completed by publishers or top editors for a 36.4 percent response rate.

While this response rate is too low to generalize the findings to the entire southern region, they hold “meaningful implications” for newspaper coverage of public health disasters, the researchers suggested. Previous research shows that most Americans rely on the news media during health crises, turning to television news initially but, over time, relying most on newspapers for a “deeper understanding of the social consequences of a community problem,” according to the researchers.

The researchers originally hypothesized that newspapers taking a watchdog approach to coverage would be poorly prepared in case of a health crisis because public health officials dislike confrontation. So they might be less accessible to watchdog reporters. But the survey indicated just the opposite.

“The more reporters adopted a watchdog role in dealing with public health emergencies, the higher the level of preparedness” to cover them, the researchers stated.

For more information, see Wilson Lowrey, Karla Gower, William Evans, and Jenn Mackay, “Assessing Newspaper Preparedness for Public Health Emergencies” in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Volume 81 (Summer 2006), pp. 362 – 380.

*Journalists misjudge seriousness of global warming public nuisance lawsuits, attorneys say*

Attorneys analyzing coverage of a case alleging that electric power plants are contributing to global warming suggest that the news media misunderstand the seriousness of such lawsuits.

In *Connecticut v. American Electric Power Co.*, plaintiffs charge that six electric power corporations operating more than 170 power plants in 20 states are contributing to global warming and constitute a public nuisance.

News reports of the lawsuit have been “highly superficial,” the attorneys, who represent plaintiffs in a companion suit, stated in a recent issue of the *Boston College Environmental Affairs Law Review*. They identified two major problems in coverage of the legal proceedings.

The first is journalists’ failure to understand the legal theory of “joint and several liability” – specifically, that plaintiffs do not need to prove that emissions from each power plant involved in the case are causing harm. Rather, plaintiffs need only show that each plant’s emissions are contributing to the overall body of pollution, the attorneys wrote. Courts have rejected claims that an individual defendant should not be held liable even if its pollution alone does not cause harm when it is one of many polluters contributing to the overall problem, they stated.

Second, the general public and the news media tend to understand “public nuisance” as a minor annoyance, but it is a “particularly powerful doctrine,” they wrote, with “roots in the police power with a far-reaching ability to impose court-ordered changes in conduct” and “grounded in the constitutional right of states and citizens to defend themselves against harmful conduct.”

The general public’s tendency to interpret a public nuisance case as merely a bid to win a monetary settlement “has been exploited by those opposed to the lawsuit, who use this pejorative definition of nuisance to disparage the lawsuit,” the attorneys stated.

The article provides an overview of public nuisance law relevant to global warming and a summary of research on news media coverage of global warming in large-circulation newspapers.

For more information, see Matthew F. Pawa and Benjamin A. Krass, “Behind the Curve: The National Media’s Reporting on Global Warming” in *Boston College Environmental Affairs Law Review*, Volume 33, Number 3 (2006), pp. 485 – 509.

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*Jan Knight, a former magazine editor and daily newspaper reporter, is a former assistant professor of communication at Hawaii Pacific University in Honolulu, where she continues to teach online courses in writing and environmental communication. She can be reached at jknight213@aol.com.*

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# Nanoprotections for nanotechnology?

BY NOREEN PARKS

Nanotechnology – the development and use of materials whose building blocks measure billionths of a meter – is being hailed as the new industrial revolution.

Hundreds of commercial products, from cosmetics and medicines to electronics and automobiles, already contain nanomaterials. Countless others, including new cancer therapies, pollution-gobbling compounds, and more efficient solar cells, are on the drawing board.

While potential benefits are enormous, cautionary notes ring out from many scientists and watchdog groups on the potential risks of this revolutionary class of materials.

On Sept. 25, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) released its first review on the National Nanotechnology Initiative (NNI), a consortium of 20 federal agencies whose investments in nanotech activities totaled roughly \$1.1 billion for fiscal year 2006. The report concluded that research on environmental, health, and safety aspects of nanotechnology – which amounted to only \$38.5 million, or 3.7 percent, of the NNI's budget – is “inconclusive to date,” and “knowledge and data to assess risks are incomplete.” Responsible development requires more effective methods for risk assessment and expanded research on potential impacts, the review stated.

The report highlighted two key attributes of nanomaterials that underscore the need for increased research: their particle size allows for inhalation and absorption by organisms, and their structures can promote specific biological activities.

While this has implications for consumer product safety and the environment at large, NAS review chair Jim Williams, a materials engineer at Ohio State University-Columbus, sees the protection of workers involved in manufacturing nanomaterials as the paramount safety concern. From the relatively few such studies assessing the toxicity of nanomaterials, there's been evidence of adverse effects on cell cultures and lab animals. In view of such findings, the report deemed it “prudent to employ some precautionary measures” for EHS protections, but, says Williams, there are not enough data to even make specific recommendations on this.

Gaps in regulatory laws, agency powers and budgets raise additional concerns. For instance, the federal chemical control law – the 1976 U.S. Toxic Substances Control Act – doesn't distinguish between chemicals that have identical composition but differing structural properties, a critical factor for nanomaterials. And the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) – which in recent years has come under increasing fire and suffered plummeting public confidence for numerous regulatory lapses – has only limited authority over potentially high-risk products such as nanomaterials in cosmetics. In October 2006, former FDA Deputy Commissioner for Policy Michael Taylor testified publicly that the FDA needs 50 percent higher funding just to enable it to fulfill its standing obligations and new Congressional mandates issued since 1996, not to mention preparing for nanotechnology and the agency's regulatory role in that arena.

Indeed, federal oversight of nanotechnology manufacturing, products, and health and environmental impacts is piecemeal at best. NNI member agencies such as the National Science Foundation, the Environmental Protection Agency and the

National Institutes of Health support relevant research programs, though FDA sponsors no such research. Meanwhile, no overarching federal policies exist.

In sharp contrast to the U.S.'s risk-based approach to nanomaterial regulation (a no-data, no-regulation method), the European Union is pursuing precautionary protections under its



REACH (Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals) program, which is slated for adoption by late 2006. The REACH action plan calls for the risk assessment of nanotechnology-based products to start “at the point of conception” of materials “and include research and development, manufacturing, distribution, use and disposal or recycling.”

Pinning down the environmental impacts of nanomaterials in the early stages of development could not only result in better, safer products, but would also minimize long-term liability for industry, and reduce hazards for workers, writes a research team led by Mark Wiesner, an environmental engineer from Duke University, in a recent paper in *Environmental Science & Technology*.

“Although many unknowns surround the fate [and impacts] of nanomaterials in the environment...a great deal is known about the properties and effects of the [conventional] materials used to produce them,” the authors say. For example, the use of toxic chemicals such as benzene and heavy metals demands that the risks of nanomaterials fabrication be considered well before specific information on nanomaterials themselves becomes available, they argue.

Given the rapid pace of new product introductions, it's critical to formulate the right research questions and implement sound science to answer them, says Andrew Maynard of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. The center's Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies maintains online databases on related research and nanotech products and applications.

“Many of the potential impacts of nanotech are hypothetical at the moment, but clearly we can't treat this as just another class of conventional materials, or we run the risk of missing critically important issues,” Maynard warns.

Educating the public about this surging new technology wave is clearly another pressing need.

A national poll conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates found that nearly 60 percent of U.S. residents have heard “nothing” or “just a little” about nanotechnology. Just over half of them think the federal government and academic researchers should oversee its development, according to the poll.

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*Noreen Parks (nmparks@nasw.org) is a freelance science and environmental writer based in Hawaii. This article is adapted from one published in the December issue of Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment.*

*The NAS report, “A Matter of Size: Triennial Review of the National Nanotechnology Initiative,” is rich in resources for reporters. It is available online at: [www.nap.edu/catalog/11752.html](http://www.nap.edu/catalog/11752.html) (You may need to request the pdf file).*

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# Need a recorder close to your chest? Here are shopping tips

By ELSA WENZEL

Whether you're quoting a senator in the Capitol or listening for a rare bird in the forest, portable audio recorders can be a journalist's trusted sidekick. A pocket-sized device that holds dozens of hours of recordings costs about as much as a few weeks' worth of lattes. Unlike the limited microcassette and MiniDisc recorders of yesteryear, today's array of digital recorders can match a wide range of budgets and work styles.

"I use one whenever I can, especially if I'm interviewing a public official or major figure," said Jonathan M. Katz, Dominican Republic correspondent for the Associated Press. "It's useful here because I do most of my reporting in Spanish, and I'm likely to get hit with a word or expression I'll need to double check later."

His Olympus WS-300M fits inside of a jacket pocket. Built-in memory, battery life, a decent microphone, and the lack of additional cords were other key selling points for Katz.

"I like the one I just got because it has the USB port built in to the body, which prevents things like waking up in China and discovering that the cable you'll need to store hundreds of hours of interviews over the next three weeks is on a bed in Kentucky," he said.

## Where to shop

Unfortunately, such conveniences can be hard to spot at shops that leave products sealed inside a plastic package. Does the recorder connect to a computer? Does it stamp each recording with the time and date? Does it let you mark important moments for easy referral? Is the display backlit and easy to read in the dark? Can you mute any annoying beeps it might make?

"It's always best to test the device in person before buying," said Jasmine France, associate editor of digital audio reviews at technology publication CNET.com. "Try going to a retail location that has models on display, such as Best Buy."

Online research at independent forums such as Epinions.com, where fellow users review gadgets, can dig up additional details. It also pays off to check prices on the Internet. You might find the same device listed at between \$50 and \$150 on various eBay auctions as well as at multiple merchant search sites like Froogle.com.

## Memory

To read between the lines of product specifications, first determine how you want to store your recordings.

Without any disks, cassettes, or cards, Katz's Olympus holds some 60 hours of recordings at the lowest settings in its 256MB internal memory. Katz connects the device to a computer via the USB port, and then drags files to a PC folder to archive the audio.

Such devices with flash memory are easy to find and ideal if you record, erase, and re-record. Basic models start around \$40. To edit audio on the device without a computer, you may have to pay close to \$200 for a model such as those in the Olympus DS series.

Many tech-savvy journalists continue to use MiniDisc recorders, but transferring audio from these to a computer usually makes you wait while the disk plays back in real time. Newer models including the \$330 Sony MZ-RH1 can transfer audio to a PC more quickly. Yet like their microcassette ancestors, which can be had for as low as \$20, the many moving pieces in MiniDiscs can interfere with sound quality, and have been blamed for equipment breakdowns.

If you don't want disks or tapes but prefer to separate recordings from the recorder, then look for a model with memory cards. These are a good option if you're on the road without a laptop to save overflow recordings. You can always hand over a memory card to an editor, or stash it safely in case the recorder is damaged or confiscated.

"Removable media is a nice extra, and is almost exclusively found in SanDisk's players as far as the major brands go," France said. The SanDisk Sansa c200 line, for instance, runs between \$80 and \$100 with slots for MicroSD cards. Sony's Memory Stick Pro models cost \$250 and more. "But it's not that necessary, considering how cheap flash players are nowadays."

How much memory do you need?

"Interviews take up very little space usually, so you want to consider music when thinking about capacity," France said. Her rule of thumb: 1GB equals roughly 250 songs, while 2GB is equivalent to 500 songs. Therefore, a 2GB digital recorder can hold hundreds of hours of interviews. However, the higher you set the audio quality, the less recording time you'll get.

## Audio files

Audio quality and specific file formats are paramount if you use recordings for radio or the Internet. You'll save time from the start by recording in either the high-quality, uncompressed WAV format for radio, or in compact MP3 files for the Web. Saving MP3 audio at 320kbps or higher might suffice for radio in a pinch if you don't need to make CD-quality music recordings or capture ambient sounds.

However, many digital recorders use a proprietary file format, such as Sony's ATRAC and Olympus's DSS, which are fine for personal use but demand extra steps to convert to WAV for broadcast or MP3 for websites.

Some recorders save in the Windows Media Audio (WMA) format, which you can post to the Web and play on the free Windows Music Player. That's convenient if you use a Windows PC. Most affordable recorders, including common Sony and Olympus models, aren't compatible with Apple computers, although a variety of iRiver recorders are.

Broadcast professionals also need more sensitive equipment and expandability than a candy bar-sized recorder can provide. Radio-ready devices such as the Edirol R-09 or R-1 and the MicroTrack 24/96 start around \$500 without accessories and take up the space of a thick paperback book. At a similar cost, the

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## Shopping... (from page 11)

Marantz PMD670 has the heft of a hardcover bestseller, with a durable SLR microphone jack.

### Podcasts and broadcasts

A growing number of journalists and bloggers are posting informal talk shows and interviews on the Internet as MP3 podcasts. You can listen to podcasts at a computer, or download them to an iPod or other MP3 player to take on the road.

If you plan to broadcast or podcast, then make sure your digital recorder includes a microphone input, a headphone jack, and meter levels that allow you to monitor the sound and keep it from distorting. CNET's France recommends a signal-to-noise ratio higher than 90dB in a casual pocket recorder.

For interviews in noisy situations—such as marching down a marble hallway—a \$50 clip-on microphone such as the MM-LAPEL-1 can do the trick even for radio. You'll pay extra for batteries as well as volume control on these lavalier, clip-on microphones.

To dabble in podcasting, the cross-platform Audacity editing software is free. Windows users seeking extra features can consider an application such as the \$70 Sony Sound Forge Audio Studio. Mac users can turn to Apple GarageBand, which is included in the \$80 iLife software bundle.

### Hybrid devices

Perhaps you're already using an MP3 player to catch up on environmental radio shows and science podcasts during your commute. If that gadget also records audio, should you even bother to shop for a separate recording device?

The AP's Katz, for one, prefers to store and listen to music on an iPod even though his Olympus also plays MP3 files. iPods, on the other hand, only record voice if you add an accessory for about \$50.

"I'd also feel a little weird sticking an iPod in the president's face, like he was supposed to start doing karaoke or something," said Katz.

Other MP3 players that are perhaps less conspicuous and that offer ample voice recording include Creative's Zen line, SanDisk's Sansa line, and most iRiver and Samsung music players. These usually cost less than \$100 for 1GB of built-in flash storage.

"Of the aforementioned brands, probably Creative and Samsung players offer the best voice recording quality," said CNET's France. But most flash drive MP3 players only offer mono recording, and they often bury their recording functions within a deep series of menus, she added.

Some digital organizers running Palm and Pocket PC operating systems can record audio, but their recording time is paltry. Popular handheld devices that serve as telephones, including the Palm Treo and BlackBerry, only keep less than 10 minutes of voice notes each.

### Dictation

Unfortunately, there's no easy solution for transcribing recorded interviews to digital text – unless you're talking to yourself. The popular voice transcription software Dragon NaturallySpeaking (which I used to dictate most of this story) can translate recordings of your own voice directly from compatible devices and MP3 files. But whether you buy the \$200 Preferred or \$600 Professional edition of the software, each license is guaranteed to work for only one user and only on the Microsoft Windows platform.

### Green tips

Most consumer electronics are designed for disposability, which contributes to the world's growing piles of e-waste. If you want a voice recorder with a low environmental impact, then the first step is to buy one with

features you can grow into rather than a skimpy device you might tire of in a few months. Shopping for gently-used gadgets on eBay or Craigslist is another option. When the product does die, you can find responsible recycling services via the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition's guide at Etoxics.org.

Also, you can opt for more eco-friendly, rechargeable NiMH batteries over the toxic AAA alkalines commonly found within pocket recorders. When a battery dies and you're away from an outlet, a solar charger such as the Solio can power up a fading recorder.



**Trendy iPods are great for listening to music, but recording requires a \$50 accessory.**

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*Elsa Wenzel covers software and green technology as an associate editor at CNET.com. She can be reached at [elsa.wenzel@cnet.com](mailto:elsa.wenzel@cnet.com).*

# Becoming an organized user of digital recorders

By RICHARD COWDEN

It happens to reporters all the time: I remembered something that a source told me more than a month earlier when I was writing my outlook piece and knew it would make just the right quote for another piece on the same topic.

I flipped back to my notebook and located the interview notes. All I had to link to that comment was the scribbled word “privatize.” But that was enough because next to it I had written down “41:15.”

That time code referred to the point on my recording of the interview, which I had transferred from my simple digital voice recorder to my PC at the office. Within seconds I was able to find the recording, click the cursor onto the time slider on Windows Media Player, move it to 41:15, and pick up a much-needed quote.

The key to making better use of recorded events or interviews is to be able to access them readily when you want to use quoted materials in a story. Some reporters seem to work well with nothing more than a pad and paper. Others use a combination of notes and recordings. But many of us in the second category have had the experience of wanting to work a quote into a piece just before a deadline. We often abandon that idea because fumbling around with cassette tape recorders just takes too long.

Also, when I take quotes by hand, I tend to use shorter sentences or phrases than a source actually uses in the course of an interview or presentation. I don’t trust myself to keep up with a word-for-word transcription of a longer, complex discourse from a speaker. And yet, sometimes a quote isn’t useful if it’s only a sentence fragment taken out of the context of a more detailed statement. But if I can quickly work a perfectly accurate quote in to a piece, it’s worth the effort.

Organizing digitally recorded files takes a little getting used to, but once you do so, it opens up a new way of approaching the job. For example, I have always liked to work from my quotes and let knowledgeable sources explain critical information or points of view in their own words. The capability of moving easily to quotes and knowing that you can get them down exactly right is a real boon to any reporter. The advantage of preserving this material for possible future use is probably an even better argument for digital recording.

In some cases, it makes sense to e-mail copies of the files to colleagues who might benefit from hearing an interview or panel discussion that you’ve covered. Try doing that with tape.

## How to Use the Digital Recorder

The advantages of digital recording make me more likely to use quotes to tell the story, which I think enhances what I’m trying to convey to the reader.

Jotting down time codes from the recorder as you take notes is a crucial component of using a digital recorder to make use of quotes in a story. I write down time codes right next to the key words from a speaker. I also put them in the margins of my notes throughout a presentation just to keep a running log of what’s being said. These time codes allow you to find the needed quote because it would take too long under deadline pressure to hunt down a particular quote.

Keep your recorder where you can see it. Many reporters turn on their recorder and put it near a speaker so they can get the best possible sound. But if you can’t see the time code, you lose the benefit of coordinating your notes with your recording.

Even after using the initial recording for a same day story, setting up directories in your computer for the digital file can help you establish a useful archive in case you want to use the information in a later story. Even if you think you won’t revisit these files very often, you might as well do it just to clear memory space on your recorder that you will need for the future.

At the beginning of the year, create a “2007” subdirectory using Windows Explorer. Decide where you will create the file for the digital recording files – I use the My Documents file. Create a subdirectory and files for each month. Directories for 2006 will look like this:

```
My Documents
  BNA Materials
    2006
      Jan.
      Feb.
      March
      April
      May
      June
      July
      Aug.
      Sept.
      Oct.
      Nov.
      Dec.
```

Each recorder will have slightly different means of copying files to a computer. They typically connect to the PC with a proprietary cable. Some may require that you load up software developed specifically for that recorder, but many can be automatically detected by Windows.

Unless you do have a system that uses proprietary software and a dedicated screen that shows up on the PC, as in the case of the Olympus recorders, you can “drag and drop” files directly to your PC’s hard drive. As soon as the recorder is attached to the cable and the cable is plugged into a USB port on your PC, you may see a Windows prompt that says the computer has recognized an external device.

Go to Desktop and double click on Windows Explorer. It will display your basic file tree, with My Documents, BNA Materials and other major directories shown at the top, and with directories, such as My Computer shown further down. To prepare for the file transfer, take the following steps:

- Double click on My Documents
- Find the appropriate year, such as 2006, and double click on it. It will display all of the months you’ve created for that year so far.
- Double click on My Computer. The Windows Explorer screen will be divided into two halves, with the available drives [Local Disk (C:), DVD/CD-RW (D:), Removable Disk (E:)]

*(Continued next page)*

## Recorders... (from page 13)

displayed on the right half.

- Double click on Removable Disk (E:) to reveal the files contained on the recorder.
- Highlight the file you want to copy to the PC.
- Drag and drop the file into the subdirectory for the appropriate month.

If you have done this right, you should see a box showing progress copying the file. The larger the file, the longer this will take.

When you record a file, depending on the device, it will have a generic name, such as "micdata001." Once it has been copied to a subdirectory, you need to immediately rename it by right-clicking on the file and selecting "rename" from the drop-down menu. When you do this, a gray label with a blinking cursor will appear next to the file icon. Rename the file in a way that will help you remember the interview or event. I also include the exact date, such as 1-25-6. One of my typical files might be named "Greenspan spch 1-25-6.wav". You have to make sure the appropriate three-digit file extension is at the end of the name. If your device records in "wav" files, the extension should always be ".wav".

Once you have your file on the PC, you can double click on it and bring it up in Windows Media Player. The player's screen will vary a bit, depending on the version of the program you have on your PC, but all of them provide a simple set of on-screen buttons to play, stop, pause, and so on. When you hit the play button, the recording will begin and a slide bar at the bottom will show the file's progress as it plays.

You can click on the progress marker and move it instantly to any point you choose in the recording. No more fast-forwarding or rewinding. If you have a quote noted at 41:15, click on the marker and move it until the time code counter on the

player indicates that number. Then hit the play button. If you don't get the whole quote transcribed on the first playing, you can move the marker back and hit play again.

### Choosing a recorder.

You can get a machine that's designed specifically for digital voice recording, such as a whole range of Olympus devices, or you can get any of several new MP3 players that also have FM radios and recording capability. This class of devices provides impressively high-quality sound (some of them record in stereo) and usually the ability to use an external microphone if you really want the best sound quality.

I've had three recording MP3 players, which also have pros and cons. Their microphones tend not to be very good. These devices would benefit from the ability to plug in an external microphone, but none of them I've seen has such an outlet. But they're cheap, simple to use and often have much more available flash memory than the Olympus units. I've found I can "push" a relatively faint recording on one of these

Also, since it is important to be able to read the time code, it may be worth the effort of looking for a device with a relatively large read-out.

On balance, I suppose I would recommend a device intended specifically for recording voice. If you're looking for one online, I recommend going to CNET.com, Bizrate.com, or Epinions.com and searching for "digital voice recorders." You should be able to get a decent one for less than \$50 to \$100.

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*Richard Cowden is a reporter for the Bureau of National Affairs's Banking Daily report. BNA is a leading publisher of information and analysis products for professionals in law, tax, business, and government.*

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Dying Alaska sockeye courtesy of Orna Izakson



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# Pittsburgh TV station wows viewers with environment stories

By **JIM PARSONS**

“No one cares about the environment.”

If you work in local television news, chances are you’ve heard more than one news director or executive producer make that claim. I have. I expected to hear it again four years ago when I pitched a special project idea for the upcoming Nielsen ratings period, also known as “sweeps.”

We learned that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was planning to fill 60-foot deep holes in the Allegheny River that were created by years of commercial sand and gravel dredging. Because of the depth of the dredge holes, some native aquatic species could not survive. But the Corps’ plan to “fix” the problem seemed suspect to us, despite a spokesman’s attempt to convince us it wasn’t.

“There are portions of the Allegheny River that are simply too deep to sustain life,” said Corps spokesman Dick Dowling. “We have an opportunity with this dredge material from our navigation project in the Mon River to correct that problem and make the Allegheny a better place for the ecology.”

That’s right. The Corps wanted to make the Allegheny River a “better place for the ecology” by dumping in a million tons of muck from the bottom of the Monongahela River. The Corps needed to get rid of the material because it was constructing a new dam at Braddock, Pa. But more than a hundred years of steel-making had turned the muddy floor of the Mon into a toxic soup. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission warned fishermen not to eat catfish from the Braddock section of the Mon because of PCB contamination. Up river, chlordane was present in bottom-dwelling fish.

Okay, back to the pitch. I started by reminding my news director, Bob Longo, that hundreds of thousands of people in Allegheny County get their drinking water from the Allegheny River. That certainly helped the sale, although this news director was already environmentally-friendly. I knew his hobbies included hiking, camping and mountain-biking. Still, this was not just a journalistic decision; it was also a business decision. There was no doubt he would give me a green light on the story. But would he embrace it as a sweeps project?

The distinction is important. In a way, sweeps stories in local television are the equivalent of special projects at newspapers. Reporters get extra time to develop and tell them and additional resources to produce them. Also, the Creative Services Department promotes the stories for several days in 30-second time slots that would normally be filled with commercial spots. It’s a showcase for a story that, hopefully, will appeal to a large audience. Historically, you didn’t find many commercial stations using that showcase for stories about the environment.

“No one cares about the environment,” Bob Longo started. There it was again, that maddening statement.

“That’s what all of the research tells us. In focus groups, viewers rank environmental issues pretty far down the list of

what’s important to them,” I recall him saying. I muttered something unflattering about research consultants, and got red in the face. Longo, wearing a satisfied smile, let me go on for a while, then said, “Great story. Go get it.”

We did, and the overnight ratings showed a substantial increase in our audience during that segment of the newscast (a transcript of that story can be found at [www.thepittsburghchannel.com/team4/1637939/detail.html](http://www.thepittsburghchannel.com/team4/1637939/detail.html)).

Since then, we’ve produced environmental projects in almost every ratings period, including stories about:

- eco-terrorism in Allegheny National Forest ([www.thepittsburghchannel.com/team4/1775308/detail.html](http://www.thepittsburghchannel.com/team4/1775308/detail.html));
- ALCOSAN’s practice of spreading sewage sludge on farm fields ([www.thepittsburghchannel.com/team4/2184516/detail.html](http://www.thepittsburghchannel.com/team4/2184516/detail.html));
- particulate matter 2.5 pollution in Pittsburgh ([www.thepittsburghchannel.com/team4/4211977/detail.html](http://www.thepittsburghchannel.com/team4/4211977/detail.html));
- PennDOT’s practice of spreading hazardous materials on roads to control dust ([www.thepittsburghchannel.com/team4/5331654/detail.html](http://www.thepittsburghchannel.com/team4/5331654/detail.html));
- and a report exposing a cozy relationship between Pennsylvania’s DEP and a company that needed 11th hour permit approval for a new power plant ([www.thepittsburghchannel.com/news/9245638/detail.html](http://www.thepittsburghchannel.com/news/9245638/detail.html)).

In November 2006, viewers inundated us with calls and e-mails following two stories that contained environmental elements: a report about coal bed methane drilling and property rights ([www.thepittsburghchannel.com/team4/10276156/detail.html](http://www.thepittsburghchannel.com/team4/10276156/detail.html)); and another about abuses in the Clean & Green property tax assessment reduction program, which was designed to preserve open space and prevent suburban sprawl ([www.thepittsburghchannel.com/team4/10293250/detail.html](http://www.thepittsburghchannel.com/team4/10293250/detail.html)).

I was fortunate to have a news director willing to toss the research out the window in the face of a compelling story that had a potential impact on our viewers’ lives.

Perhaps the researchers who query members of those focus groups are asking the wrong question. Instead of “How likely would it be for you to watch a story about the environment?” they should be asking “How likely would it be for you to watch a story about pollution in the source of your drinking water?”

Regardless of the semantics, local television viewers do care about the condition of the world around them. And as long as we tell them about those conditions in a compelling way that informs and enlightens, they won’t think of changing the channel.

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*Jim Parsons is an investigative reporter for WTAE TV in Pittsburgh, a division of Hearst-Argyle Television. He won first place in the 2006 SEJ Awards for Reporting on the Environment, and received second place in the 2005 SEJ Awards. Jim also won first place in the 2006 National Headliner Awards for a report on particulate matter pollution around Pittsburgh.*

# Use this method to track and analyze toxic sites in your state

By DAVID POULSON

You had a pretty good deal if you covered Michigan’s environment between 1990 and 1995. State officials called an annual press conference to announce a long list of polluted sites. Reporters from throughout the state came to the capital to find out about those in their circulation areas.

They reported the new sites, the ones that continued to fester, the ones that made progress, the orphan ones without anyone to clean them up, the ones representing the greatest health threats. In most communities, it was a front-page story that pressured regulators, politicians and industry to tackle some of the nastiest pollution problems. No one wanted to be listed among the top 10 most-polluted sites in a county and certainly not in the state. No one wanted to answer the question, “Why aren’t things any better this year?”

Industry representatives hated that story – so much so that they successfully lobbied to remove the legal requirement for the annual press conference. In 1995, the story dropped mostly out of sight.

And that drives me nuts.

More than 10 years later, that data is not only still collected, it is easily available online. It may not come on a silver platter at a press conference, but anyone with modest spreadsheet skills can produce their own annual review of local contaminated sites.

Computer-assisted reporting yields great stories on the environment beat. Regulators and others record a ton of environmental data for enforcement or to monitor trends. And while we all know about the Toxics Release Inventory and other federal data sets, state data is often superior and makes for more compelling stories.

It is the journalist’s responsibility – and great joy – to learn the skills needed to analyze such data. After all, we’re supposed to interpret the rest of the world for readers instead of praying that someone else does it for us.

What follows is an easy recipe for analyzing pollution data in Microsoft Excel. It involves the Michigan data, but I’ll wager that every state collects equally fascinating environmental data that lends itself to similar treatment. You’re a reporter – dig it out. Then run through this exercise, and you’ll be primed to turn data into stories.

## Getting started

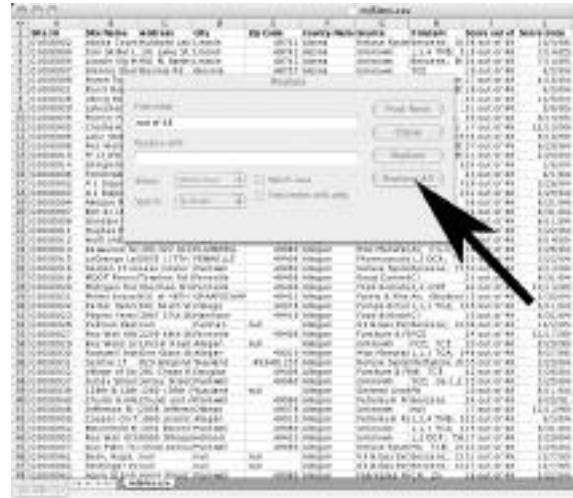
Go to [www.michigan.gov/deq](http://www.michigan.gov/deq), the Web site for the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. Click “online services” at the top, and then “Part 201 Site Search” from the list. This interface searches for information on Michigan sites of environmental contamination. Part 201 refers to a section of state law requiring that these sites be listed.

Click on the link that says “Download the Part 201 Site List in MS Excel” and save it to your desktop. Now open the file in Excel. Let’s clean it up a bit.

(Note: This exercise was designed for PCs, but should work on Macs, too. The only significant difference is that most Mac commands use the “open apple” key instead of the “control” key.)

The higher the score, the greater the risk. A 48 is the highest score possible. Let’s remove “out of 48” from each cell in the score column. Hit control f to produce the find and replace box,

and click the replace tab. After “Find what:” insert “out of 48” without the quote marks. Leave the “Replace with:” box blank. Click “replace all.”



We don’t need the geographic information contained in columns K through O. Highlight them by putting the cursor on the letter K and dragging across to the letter O. Now click edit/delete.

Notice that the columns are often too narrow for the information they contain. You can see more if you click and drag the line separating the letters. Scroll down the records with the scroll bar on the right. How many sites are listed? Don’t forget to subtract for the first row that contains your column headers.

## Some basic crunching

Figure the average score of Michigan’s toxic sites. Type the word “average” in a cell in column H that is two spaces below the data. In the cell to the right, type: =average(I2:I3174). I3174 is the last cell in this example. If your last cell is different, insert that number instead.



Hit enter and Excel will average all the numbers in the I column. Doesn’t that beat entering nearly 3,000 numbers into a calculator?

# Feature

On the next line figure the median – the middle value – with a formula that says =median(I2:I3174).

## Some basic sorting

Figure out the location of the sites with the highest scores. Click anywhere in the main data block. Simultaneously hit shift, control, asterisk to highlight all of the contiguous cells. If a data point is separated from the block, it won't be highlighted. In this case, we highlighted all of the information in the spreadsheet except the average and median.

Now click data/sort. We want to sort by score. Under the drop-down menu "sort by," choose "score." To get the highest scores on top, click descending and hit OK.

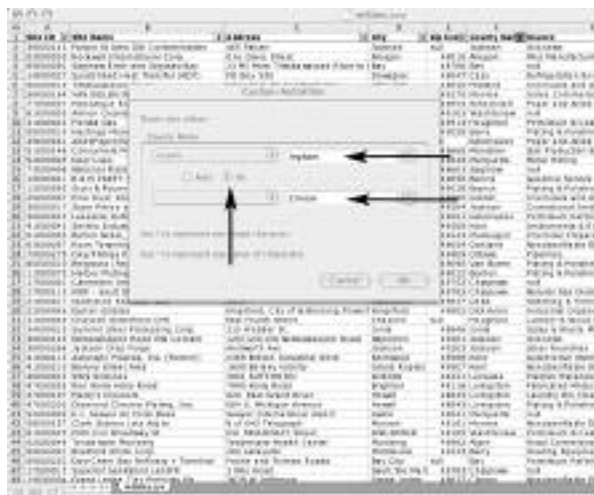


The whole database is now sorted from highest to lowest score. If you had sorted by county or by site name, Excel would have sorted the database by reverse (descending) alphabetical order by those columns.

## Find the local angle

This is good stuff, but it doesn't tell us anything about what's happening locally.

Go to data, but this time click filter and then auto filter. Arrows appear to the right of each column header. Click the one next to "county name" and select "custom filter." Your publication covers Ingham and Clinton counties. When the filter box appears, insert those names and make sure that the "or" (not the "and") is selected. Hit OK and now you've got a database of records affiliated with just Ingham and Clinton counties.



Save it for analysis. With the new spreadsheet highlighted (shift, control, asterisk), hit edit/copy (or control c). Now go to insert/worksheet. When the new worksheet appears, click on cell A1 and then edit/paste to paste your data. At the bottom of the spreadsheet are two tabs. One has the original spreadsheet (miSites) and the other has the one you just created. Double click on the tab you just created (sheet 1) and change the name to "local sites."



## The payoff

Now you've got a local subset of the state database. Sort to find the local sites with the highest scores. What are the average and median local scores? How do they compare with the statewide figures? Have they changed from last year? Why?

Sort by "score date" to find out when some of your local sites were scored. How come it's been so long?

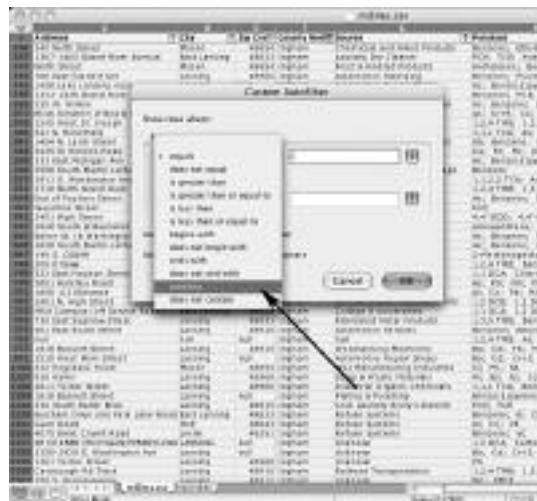
Answers to such questions are a good start for a local story with statewide context. If nothing else, you've got some good questions to ask.

And if you do a similar analysis annually, you can report whether new sites were added or old sites were cleaned up or improved during the previous year.

## Further analysis

Go back to the sheet with all the sites (miSites) to figure out how many are contaminated with toluene. Highlight the data (shift, control, asterisk), and turn the filter back on by going to data/filter/auto filter.

Click on the arrow next to pollutant. Select custom filter. Fill in the blanks to search for records where pollutant contains toluene. You could do this for any pollutant.



Now let's find out if any of the sites are owned by Michigan

(Continued next page)



# Toxic... (from page 17)

State University. Go to data/filter/show all. The auto filter arrows should still be active, but if you don't see the arrows near your data headers, highlight your data and go to data/filter/autoFilter. Click the arrow next to name and select custom. Filter for records that contain Michigan State University OR MSU.

Notice that of the four MSU sites listed, only two are listed as "Colleges & Universities" under the source column. If you had filtered the data for sources that are "College & Universities," you might have missed two of the MSU sites. That's a good example of how data is sometimes misleading. You have to be careful to anticipate such pitfalls.



What other categories of ownership might you investigate?  
**Looking more deeply**

Let's figure out which county has the most sites.

Go to the miSites sheet and click data/filter/autoFilter to click the auto filter off. Highlight all of your data. Go to Data and click on "PivotTable and PivotChart report."

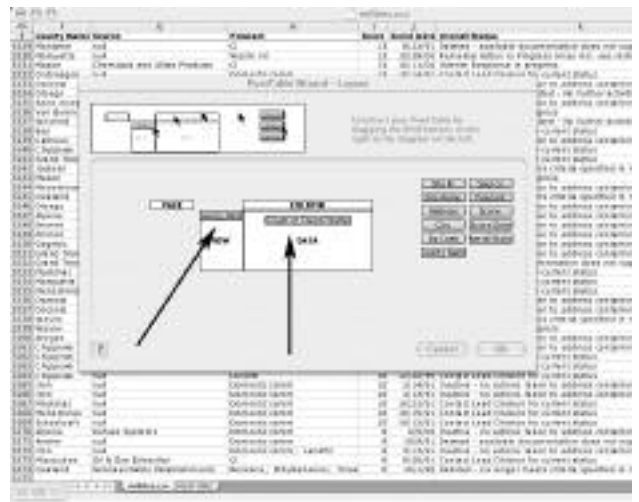
We're analyzing an Excel document, so click next to accept the default.

Click next again to verify the range of data. It should be right because you already highlighted it.

Now click on layout.

Visualize the perfect chart for listing the number of sites. Each county would list the total sites in that county. From the buttons on the right, click and drag county name into the row field.

Now click and drag county name into the data area. It will change to "count of county name." Click OK. Click Finish to create a new worksheet.



Now you've got a list of counties and a count of the number of sites in each one.

To put them in order, click on the first number under total. Go to data/sort and click descending in the box that appears.

Click OK and the number of sites should be in descending order. (A short cut is to click the button that says Z to A). Note that this data is now under a new tab of your spreadsheet.

Go to your local sheet and, using the same technique, figure out which cities in your readership area have the most sites.

More screenshots for this exercise, as well as additional exercises: <http://ej.msu.edu/resources.php>.

*David Poulson is the Associate Director of the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism and teaches computer-assisted reporting at Michigan State University.*

# Awards... (from page 5)

According to the judges, this team offered a "remarkable, ambitious report.... It featured a superb team effort, starting with Misty Edgecomb's reporting and writing."

2nd Place:

Paso Del Norte Stories – *El Diario De Juarez*. Erick Falcon.

3rd Place:

Assorted stories – *The (Canton, OH) Repository*. Paul E. Kostyu.

**Outstanding Television Reporting, Large Market**

1st Place:

"Dirty Secret" – WBAL-TV News Baltimore, MD. John Sherman and Beau Kershaw.

The two reporters documented how a composting facility was polluting Chesapeake Bay. The judges called their work "very good investigative reporting, with results."

2nd Place:

"Melting Point: Tracking the Global Warming Threat" – CNN Atlanta. Miles O'Brien.

3rd Place:

"Car Inspection Corruption: D.E.P. Manager Target of Federal Probe" – CBS-4 TV News-Boston. Kristen M. Setera.

**Outstanding Television Reporting, Small Market**

1st Place:

"Toxic Treatment" – WTAE-TV Pittsburgh, PA. Jim Parsons, Kendall Cross and Shawn Quinlan.

The judges said their investigation of dust-control agents used on Pennsylvania roads featured "deep reporting, potent statistics to back up the claims, and well-picked experts [that] give this story depth."

2nd Place:

"The Dirt on Dickson County" – WSMV-TV Nashville, TN. Demetria Kalodimos and Phil Dunaway.

3rd Place:

"Delicate Blooms: South Florida's Native Orchids" – WTCU-TV Southwest Florida. Alexa Elliott.

## TRI... (from page 1)

line was “Air of peril,” with a subhead of “More hazardous chemicals are going into Kentucky skies than anyone knew.” There was a sidebar, too: “Government’s response shows usefulness of chemical release reports.” These stories set in motion years of continuous coverage of industrial pollution in the *Courier-Journal* that continues today.

Thurm recalled how he had spent six or seven days in the state’s environmental protection offices, pouring over four boxes of paper forms – reports from chemical plants and other industrial facilities detailing what they were sending to the air, water or for disposal in landfills.

He said he entered the numbers into a suitcase-sized “portable” computer. While partway through the task, he said state officials decided they better do the same. The coverage included a county-by-county map and bar chart that identified the communities with the largest amounts of industrial toxic chemicals emitted into the air.

By reviewing the paper records, Thurm said he discovered that one company was still sending waste to a site that had already been designated for cleanup under the Superfund law – a big no-no. He then informed a top state environmental official of the finding.

“You could watch his jaw drop and hit the desk,” Thurm said.

Tim Wheeler, SEJ’s president, remembered something similar when he worked at the *Evening Sun* in Baltimore. “I went to the Maryland Department of the Environment and asked to see the reports, and they directed me to one or more boxes into which they had thrown them. They hadn’t even bothered to sort them.”

Armed with a Radio Shack portable computer – he could not remember whether it was a TRS-80 or TRS-100 – and a summer intern, Wheeler entered the data and took it back to the newspaper’s computer whiz to crunch.

“While we were doing that, at least a couple of the chemical companies here who’d been notified by the state that we were digging through their TRI reports contacted us to tell us how misleading the data were. But they also volunteered that they had taken steps to reduce emissions.”

The resulting stories, Wheeler said, “generated lots of calls and letters from outraged readers.”

And the next year, Maryland began putting the data on their own computers, so the newspaper didn’t have to anymore, he said.

Author Sandra Steingraber of Trumansburg, N.Y., used TRI in her 1997 book, “Living Downstream,” which explored the environmental links to human cancer.

“The book reveals how I obtained the TRI data for my hometown (in downstate Illinois) and how I used it to pursue further

research,” she said. “There are many scenes of me driving out to toxic hot spots along the Illinois River, as identified by TRI, and lots of natural history-type description of these landscapes –



Courtesy of THE (LOUISVILLE) COURIER-JOURNAL/Pat McDonogh

**Tim Duncan protests a chemical plant in Louisville, Ky. He’s a former board member of the group Rubbertown Emergency Action, which used TRI to learn more about the pollution coming from Louisville chemical plants.**

many of which are places I once played as a child.”

She recalled how the research required poring over lots of paper documents. How things have changed with the Internet, she said.

“Since the book came out a decade ago, I now talk to my audiences about the fact that, with the help of the Internet ... citizens can get the same information about their communities in ten minutes, whereas it took me about six months to do this kind of sleuthing,” Steingraber said.

As is often the case with environmental programs, TRI began out of tragedy.

As SEJ *TipSheet* and *WatchDog Edition* editor Joe Davis wrote in *Environment Writer*, in 2004, “TRI was born in the ‘Bhopal Bill’ of 1986 – an effort by Congress to reduce the chances that the Union Carbide chemical disaster that killed thousands in Bhopal, India, in December 1984, could happen in the United States. The ‘Emergency Planning & Community Right to Know Act’ (EPCRA), a title of the 1986 Superfund reauthorization bill, was revolutionary in that it proposed to fight pollution with information.”

Neighborhood activists like Eboni Cochran, a board member of the Rubbertown Emergency Action citizen watchdog group in Louisville, are grateful. She tells me her group uses TRI frequently to track the performance of chemical plants in her neighborhoods.

Those same Louisville chemical plants, like many across the

(Continued next page)

## TRI. (from page 19)

United States, often use TRI to track their own improving pollution bottom lines – and to let the public know how they’ve cut back their emissions.

murders by zip code – to interpret. But TRI remains remarkable for what it is – a way to quickly get a pollution snapshot for a neighborhood, a county, a state, or the country as a whole.

Journalists use it in different ways now. Some still do the annual story that shows whether emissions are up or down. Some use it to help with major projects.

When there’s any sort of an environmental accident at an industrial facility, it’s one of the first places I look in trying to understand what might be going on there.

Mike Hawthorne of the *Chicago Tribune* offered one good example from a poor, largely Latino neighborhood in Chicago. There, neighbors had complained for years about metallic-tasting smoke rolling down the street, Hawthorne said.

“Residents called me, and a quick (Microsoft) Access query of the TRI database revealed that an aging smelter at the edge of the neighborhood was the largest source of airborne lead in the entire Chicago area.

“At first, the state and federal EPAs said there was nothing wrong. But it turned out the smelter’s lead emissions weren’t regulated. The neighbors ultimately paid an independent lab to analyze soil samples that contained very high lead levels, prompting the Illinois EPA to conduct its own tests.

“The U.S. EPA later inspected the plant and found a few minor violations of the Clean Air Act that had nothing to do with the lead emissions. But to resolve the case, the company agreed to clean up.”

Likewise, Tom Henry of *The Toledo Blade* checked out the TRI data on a coke plant touted as a model for a similar one proposed in his area. After Henry’s stories, the proposed Toledo-area plant was issued a much more restrictive air quality permit.

It’s not that there wasn’t any reporting on chemical pollution before TRI. Mike Dunne and Bob Anderson at *The Advocate* in Baton Rouge, La., in the mid-1980s used discharge permits issued by the EPA, in which companies reported their limits and their discharge, to develop a 40-page, no-ad tabloid special report, “Louisiana’s Chemical Legacy.”

“We received about 20 pounds of documents from EPA, which I spread out in my living room on the floor and used a calculator to compute what was being discharged along the Mississippi River ‘Chemical Corridor.’

“When we talked with plant officials, they sometimes said they reported about what their permits allowed, being concerned that if they were well below the permit limits, someone would want to reduce the permit limits. Of course, no one reported discharging more than their limit.

“The permits gave us an idea of what chemicals were permitted to be discharged into our air and about how much. As far as I know, we were one of the first newspapers to ever seek all the permits and then add them all up to give something of a comprehensive look at chemical discharges in an area.

“Twenty years later, I have a CD I can pop into my laptop or desktop and call up those same sorts of numbers in no time. I prefer computerization.”

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*James Bruggers, an SEJ board member, covers the environment for The (Louisville) Courier-Journal and courier-journal.com. His daily blog is at courier-journal.com/earthblog.*

Photo courtesy of THE (LOUISVILLE) COURIER-JOURNAL/Michael Clevenger



**Both *The Courier-Journal* in Louisville and Louisville residents have used the EPA’s Toxics Release Inventory to get information about pollution from Louisville’s Rubbertown-area chemical companies.**

Davis has noted that it helped kick-start some of the early computer-assisted reporting that swept the news business in the 1980s and 1990s.

The data from TRI has never been perfect, however.

In a pollution report card that I undertook in 2003 for industries in Louisville, for example, I found that one company reported off-the-charts releases of a particular chemical. When I asked about it, it turned out that the company had made a reporting error. The EPA backed up the business’ account.

It’s also subject to criticism because it merely tells you how much stuff gets dumped or pumped into the environment – not whether what’s getting dumped or pumped can cause harmful effects. Some chemicals are simply more toxic than others. Journalists who want to dig deeper and address some of these criticisms can explore the EPA’s Risk-Screening Environmental Indicators program. It allows for the adjustment of risk to TRI reported emissions.

Imperfections, no doubt, will send some journalists running to other beats, where data may be simpler – say, the number of



# TRI cutbacks: On hold or on deck?

By **JOSEPH A. DAVIS**

Is the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) headed for ruin or rescue? After more than a year of political struggle, a rescue may be in the cards, but it is still hard to tell for sure.

Congress had fired several warning shots in 2006 across the bow of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which had proposed in September 2005 to raise thresholds for numerical reporting of toxic releases and to require industries to report every other year instead of every year. But Congress at this writing has taken no final or binding action, EPA and the White House have not backed down, and not all the lame-duck wild cards have been played.

Under TRI, industrial facilities handling certain toxic materials in amounts above certain thresholds have to estimate and report every year on the amount they release into the environment. The releases, which may be harmful to human health, are in some cases unregulated. The rationale behind the 1986 TRI law was that public awareness of the toxic releases would bring public pressure on industry to reduce them. By most accounts, that strategy has worked. TRI has been a key tool for environmental journalists.

EPA in a 2005 notice to Congress said it was planning to reduce the TRI reporting frequency (the law requires EPA to notify Congress a year in advance if it intends to do this). At the same time, EPA in a proposed rulemaking said it would expand eligibility for industries to use TRI's short "Form A" rather than the longer "Form R" when reporting – reducing the amount of information collected by EPA and available to the public. The proposal would raise the reporting threshold for "persistent, bioaccumulative, and toxic" (PBT) substances, from 500 to 5,000 pounds per year. Below that amount, industries would not have to report any numerical data, leaving the public with no hard data at all.

Public outcry against these proposals was unusually strong and loud. Some examples:

- The Society of Environmental Journalists opposed the changes and called on EPA to withdraw them entirely. Joining SEJ in this stand were the Coalition of Journalists for Open Government, American Society of Newspaper Editors, Associated Press Managing Editors, Association of Alternative Newsweeklies, National Freedom of Information Coalition, Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and Society of Professional Journalists.

- In November 2005, a bipartisan group of six senators wrote EPA opposing the plan. That group included prospective presidential candidates John McCain (R-AZ), Hilary Rodham Clinton (D-NY), and Barack Obama (D-IL), and the incoming chair of the Senate Environment Committee, Barbara Boxer (D-CA).

- More than 100,000 citizens sent comments to the regulatory docket on the Form A proposal, almost all of them opposing both parts of EPA's plan.

- Also opposing the proposal were attorneys general from 12 states, including New York, California, Massachusetts, Illinois and Wisconsin.

- A coalition of more than 100 environmental, labor, health, and civic groups joined to formally oppose the proposed rule-making.

- New Jersey's two Democratic Senators blocked confirmation of President Bush's nominee, Molly O'Neill, to be associate administrator at EPA in charge of the Office of Environmental Information. In that job she would oversee TRI and be responsible for carrying out the proposed changes.

- The House of Representatives voted May 18, 2006, to block both EPA proposals on a bipartisan 231-187 tally. The vote came on an amendment sponsored by Frank Pallone Jr. (D-NJ) to set EPA spending for one year to carry out the proposals.

- A subpanel of EPA's Science Advisory Committee, the Environmental Economics Advisory Committee, expressed concern in a July 12, 2006, letter that the cutbacks would harm research on toxics.

- The Environmental Council of the States (ECOS) opposed the proposals in an Aug. 29, 2006, resolution. ECOS represents top environmental officials in all 50 states.

It is still unclear whether the Senate will go along with the House's ban on carrying out the proposals when the two chambers reconcile their funding in the final catch-all appropriations bill for the remainder of fiscal 2007. That bill must pass before this Congress adjourns – and it only binds EPA through September 2007.

Whatever happens, it seems likely that the incoming Democrat-controlled Congress will be poised to take even stronger action to block threats to TRI.

**11/30/06 UPDATE:** EPA seems to have backed down halfway on its threat to cut the amount of information the U.S. public gets about toxic substances that industry puts in their air, water, and soil. EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson wrote two New Jersey senators that he had decided not to switch the agency's Toxics Release Inventory from annual to every-other-year reporting. But EPA still plans other changes that would leave more than a thousand U.S. communities with no data. John Heilprin reported for The Associated Press.

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*Joseph A. Davis, Ph.D., directs SEJ's WatchDog Project, and also edits SEJ's biweekly WatchDog newsletter, its biweekly TipSheet newsletter and its weekday EJToday news digest.*

## Did you know...

you can find freedom of information act tips at [SEJ.org](http://SEJ.org)

# Parkinson's... (from page 1)

- How flame retardants are being found in the bodies of polar bears – underscoring the global transport of chemicals.

*SEJournal* asked Cone about how she works her beat:

**Q: How did you end up on the environment beat? Do you have any special background for the beat?**

**A:** I was a general assignment reporter in Florida, then at the

**A:** Since I returned from my book leave in 2004 [Cone wrote “*Silent Snow: The Slow Poisoning of the Arctic*”], I have mostly covered environmental health, focusing on the effects of various pollutants on humans and wildlife. I am essentially a science reporter, although the science of the environment is so diverse that it takes in dozens of disciplines, from economics to atmospheric chemistry. So, like any science writer, I look daily for newly published studies, or about-to-be-published ones, but I usually don’t write what we call “journal” stories and I don’t want to fall into a trap of writing about the chemical of the week.

Instead, I store the studies in special files, often on unusual topics such as infertility or autoimmune diseases. I’m looking for a trend, the piece that can awaken the reader to thinking about environmental health in a new way. My piece on how the U.S. is becoming a dumping ground for consumer products banned elsewhere grew out of a question about what industries were doing to meet European Union directives. The Parkinson’s story came

out of gradually unfolding research that has been linking the disease with pesticide exposure. There are certain parts of the beat that I follow continuously with deadline stories, such as perchlorate, while others I monitor for future longer pieces.

**Q: Can you share some of the websites, journals and other sources of information you keep up with?**

**A:** Environmentalhealthnews.org is the best website. *Environmental Health Perspectives* is among the best journals.

**Q: How do you decide what stories to pursue?**

**A:** There is no magic formula for deciding which stories to cover and which not (to cover). So many things are worth covering. But at this point in my career, it becomes a judgment call. You have to trust your instincts. Don’t feel as though you have to cover everything. But, when you do cover something, make it as complete as your editors will let you. Since children and pregnant women are the most vulnerable to contaminants, my stories often focus on them.

**Q: How many stories do you normally do in a week or a month?**

**A:** I write on average 50 to 60 stories a year. That means over 1,000 environmental stories so far!

*(Continued next page)*

Photo courtesy of the LOS ANGELES TIMES/Robert Durrell



**Gary Rieke stands in one of the rice fields he used to farm before Parkinson’s disease forced him to retire. He has long suspected that pesticide exposure played a role in his illness. His son, Greg, says “every year, there are things that we all take for granted that my dad can no longer do.”**

*Orange County Register*, and I was tired of knowing a little about everything, or perhaps more accurately, nothing about everything. I had no background in environmental issues. I grew up in Illinois, on Lake Michigan, and never even visited a national park until I was in my 20s. When I was in college, biology was for pre-med students. And chemistry? Who knew what that was for? All I remember is memorizing the periodic table of elements in high school. At the time, the only one I knew was “Fe” for iron, because I was an avid comic book reader as a child and there was a hero named Iron Man who wore a “Fe” on his chest. So, in other words, I didn’t have any natural inclination toward this beat.

But when I moved to California in 1981, I remember driving into the Los Angeles basin and wondering what that yellow stuff was in the air. Then, in 1983, I worked on a series of stories at the *Register* about firefighters and cancer. I found it intriguing that chemical exposure could have such profound effects. I also was amazed that no one at the *Register* was covering environmental issues, particularly the long, costly battle against smog. I haven’t regretted the decision to cover the environment for a single day, and it’s my 20th year now.

**Q: What do you do on a daily basis to look for stories and keep up with what is happening on the environment?**

**Q: Your contest entries included international, national and local stories. Is that because of the way the *Los Angeles Times* approaches the news or is it your approach?**

**A:** The *Los Angeles Times* prides itself in being a newspaper that excels at it all – national, foreign and local news. So, of course, I do it all, too. I especially look for California angles to global stories, and often editors are befuddled: Is this a local story or a foreign one? In many cases, it's both. In almost all cases, there is a California angle.

**Q: Many of your stories outline what papers or studies are being released as you write about them. How do you get ahead of the pack?**

**A:** If I'm ahead of the pack on what studies are coming out, it's because I'm one of the few reporters who really seems to care. Most environmental reporters only follow the really big journals or National Academy of Sciences reports. Most haven't gotten confident enough with the science to realize that there can be a great health or ecological trend story in a study entitled something like "Bioaccumulation of polybrominated compounds and effects on T4 hormones and immune function in Baltic Sea ecosystems." Read them. Do your best to understand them.

**Q: Covering the environment often means translating complex information into easy to understand and readable copy. What techniques do you use when you are writing?**

**A:** The best technique for writing about environmental health is the same technique that works for other environmental topics: Add perspective, history and analysis. It's our job to give that to our readers. Don't be afraid to say something like "Scientists are confident that chemicals in the environment are altering hormones of wild animals but they are less certain about what it means for humans who are exposed to the same things." The best stories mix consumer-friendly information with analysis of the politics and the science. To me, blending it all is what makes this beat so interesting. Frankly, when I talk about my stories with adults, I pretty much say the same things as when I describe things to my 9-year-old son. That may sound like a put-down, but I find that children are much more aware of environmental issues, such as how things accumulate in food webs, than their parents, and more intrigued by them. We have to make our readers regain that curiosity.

**Q: What are some of the emerging stories that you think reporters should keep an eye on?**

**A:** I virtually guarantee you that the subtle effects of contaminants will be one of the most important environmental topics of the century, right up there with climate change. It's not just about cancer anymore. Our fertility, our brains, our immune sys-

tems are all potentially at stake. I'm glad climate change is finally getting the attention it deserves, but why aren't the media doing the same with chemicals that are transported globally and building up in animals and humans, including breast milk? I suspect it's because most reporters are ill-informed about the state of the science.

**Q: If someone is just starting out on the environment beat, what three pieces of advice would you give to them?**



Photo courtesy of the LOS ANGELES TIMES/Robert Durell

**Dr. Donato Di Monte, left, director of basic research at the Parkinson's Institute in Sunnyvale, Calif., and Dr. Bill Langston, who founded and now directs the institute.**

**A:** Three tips for new journalists? In this time of newspaper turmoil, I'm afraid to recommend this job to anyone. But it's important to stay flexible and innovative in ways to communicate with readers, look for the big picture, and take the time to learn the science, particularly epidemiology and toxicology.

*Marla Cone, the senior environmental writer at the Los Angeles Times, graduated from University of Wisconsin at Whitewater and worked at Florida Today and the Orange County Register before joining the Times in 1990. She has twice won the national Scripps-Howard Edward Meeman Award for Environmental Reporting and in 2006 received the Society of Environmental Journalist's Best Beat Reporting Award. She was granted a prestigious Pew Fellowship in 1999 that allowed her to research the extraordinarily high levels of chemical contaminants in Arctic people and wildlife. Her 2005 book, "Silent Snow: The Slow Poisoning of the Arctic," published by Grove Atlantic, was a finalist in the National Academies' Communication Award. Reviewers called it a modern rendition of "Silent Spring" and said its "riveting narrative is as notable for its conversational fluency as for the clarity of its alarming information."*

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*Mike Dunne is assistant editor of SEJournal and writes for The Advocate in Baton Rouge.*



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## MOTM... (from page 8)

is charged to protect them. The judges called the series “an example of watchdog journalism at its finest.” Pittman also won a top award for in-depth reporting from the Florida Magazine Association for a freelance piece for *Sarasota* magazine on the risks of offshore oil and gas drilling in the Gulf of Mexico.

**Karen Schaefer**, a nine-year veteran of WCPN, an NPR affiliate in Cleveland, has taken a job at public radio station WKSU in Kent, Ohio. She will begin working on a master’s degree in environmental science. At WCPN, Schaefer established the environmental beat and won more than 30 awards for her environmental coverage. She writes that she is looking for a hybrid vehicle to offset the extra emissions from her longer commute to her home in Oberlin.

**Mark Schleifstein**, environment reporter for *The Times-Picayune*, was part of a team of reporters covering Hurricane Katrina whose work was honored with the 2006 Pulitzer Prizes for Public Service and Deadline Reporting. Schleifstein’s stories were among those honored with the paper’s 2006 George Polk Award for Metropolitan Reporting, and the 2006 National Headliner Award for hurricane reporting. Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism also awarded the staff of *The Times-Picayune* the Medill Medal for Courage in Journalism for the staff’s coverage of Hurricane Katrina through personal and professional hardship. Ball State University’s Department of Journalism has awarded the newspaper a special citation for “demonstrating the highest of journalistic values in the face of physical limitations and personal loss.” The award

citation praised the paper for its early report, written by Schleifstein and reporter **Gordon Russell**, that protective levees had been breached, while national organizations reported the city appeared to have weathered Katrina.

Reporting by Schleifstein and fellow reporter **John McQuaid** on hurricane, coastal geology and other science issues during the several years preceding Katrina was recognized with a special 2006 award to *The Times-Picayune* by the American Geophysical Union. One of the series honored by that award was “Washing Away: How south Louisiana is growing more vulnerable to a catastrophic hurricane,” which predicted many of the problems caused by Katrina. McQuaid and Schleifstein are the authors of “Path of Destruction: The Devastation of New Orleans and the Coming Age of Superstorms,” published Aug. 16 by Little, Brown & Co.

**Isa Setziol**, environment reporter, Southern California Public Radio, found that reporting on a little toad can bring some big attention to environmental reporting. One of her most popular stories in 2005, she wrote, focused on the arroyo toad (perhaps most famous for being the subject of a legal decision by Justice John Roberts before he was appointed to the Supreme Court). This year the story was honored with three awards: Golden Mike for best individual writing from the Radio Television News Directors Association of Southern California (Setziol has won that award 3 of the last 5 years); best use of sound from the LA Press Club; second place for best writing from Public Radio News Directors Inc., a national award. This serious story did include a laugh line: “Amplexus is the technical term for toad nooky.”

**Mark Schapiro** wrote a book on the U.S. response to European environmental standards, which will be published by Chelsea Green in the spring of 2007.

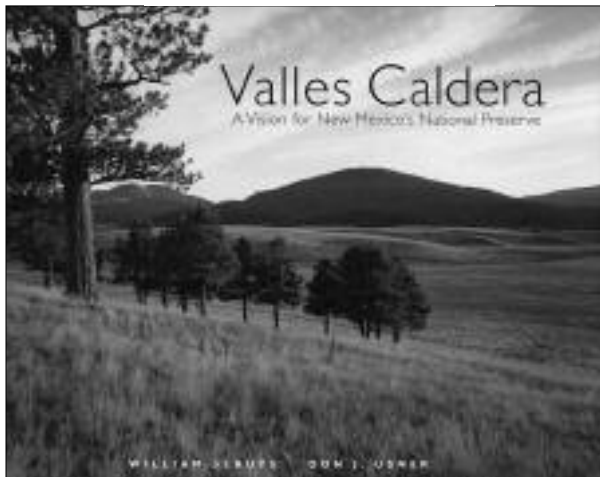
**Gus Speth**, dean, Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Science, and **Peter Haas**, political scientist, have published a book titled “Global Environmental Governance” (Island Press), which examines 10 major environmental threats and explores how they can be addressed through treaties, governance regimes and new forms of international cooperation. The book also cites the serious shortcomings of existing laws, treaties and institutions that were intended to help solve large-scale environmental problems. It is part of an F&ES series entitled “Foundations of Contemporary Environmental Studies.” Speth’s previous book, “Red Sky at Morning: America and the Crisis of the Global Environment,” won the 2005 Connecticut Book Award for nonfiction.

**David Taylor’s** book titled “Ginseng, the Divine Root: The Curious History of the Plant that Captivated the World” was published in June by Algonquin Books. The book tracks the path of the valuable medicinal plant from the forests of North America to the streets of Hong Kong and into mainland China, gaining perspectives from people who hunt the elusive “Root of Life.” Weaving together adventures in the trade with ginseng’s rich history, Taylor uncovers a story of international crime, traditional use, ecology, herbal medicine, and the vagaries of human nature.

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*Jackleen de La Harpe tracks the moves and triumphs of environmental media from her home in Portland, Ore. Send your announcement to [jadelaha@yahoo.com](mailto:jadelaha@yahoo.com).*

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## Weathering superstorms, big-box stores, toxics and toxic chips

A current of predictions and lessons from Katrina

**PATH OF DESTRUCTION: THE DEVASTATION OF NEW ORLEANS AND THE COMING AGE OF SUPERSTORMS**

By John McQuaid and Mark Schleifstein

Little, Brown, \$25.99

**THE RAVAGING TIDE: STRANGE WEATHER, FUTURE KATRINAS, AND THE COMING DEATH OF AMERICA'S COASTAL CITIES**

By Mike Tidwell

Free Press, \$24

Reviewed by TOM HENRY

Like the hurricane-force flood waters that crashed through the New Orleans levee system in 2005, there is a point in which the writing in "Path of Destruction" breaks loose and sweeps the reader up in an unstoppable literary current.

It takes patience to get there. But that's because journalists John McQuaid and Mark Schleifstein offer one of the most comprehensive perspectives yet.

Rather than simply rehash what Hurricane Katrina did to New Orleans, the two lay an incredible trail of bread crumbs for the reader to see how the Crescent City had been vulnerable to disaster for decades, if not a few hundred years.

Their points further underscore the ineptitude of officials at all levels, who had multiple opportunities to head off Katrina's seemingly unthinkable – yet largely inevitable – path of destruction.

McQuaid, a Washington-based journalist, and Schleifstein, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune's* longtime environmental writer, teamed up for a Pulitzer Prize-winning series on global fishery issues in 1997. They were vital cogs in the Pulitzer Prize the paper won this year for its Katrina coverage.

The writers' stock rose dramatically last year after the public revisited their award-winning five-part series called "Washing Away," which the *Times-Picayune* published in 2002. That series predicted that a weather-driven catastrophe was only a matter of time, exposing how New Orleans was ill-equipped for a massive evacuation. It proved to be an eerie foreshadowing of what would come three years later with Katrina, landing McQuaid and Schleifstein guest spots on countless talk shows and news programs.

"Path of Destruction" provides a balanced, hard look at New Orleans' rich cultural heritage, ecological history, fickle weather patterns, and political landscape. It raises new questions on why warnings were not heeded long ago, well before the duo's 2002 series.

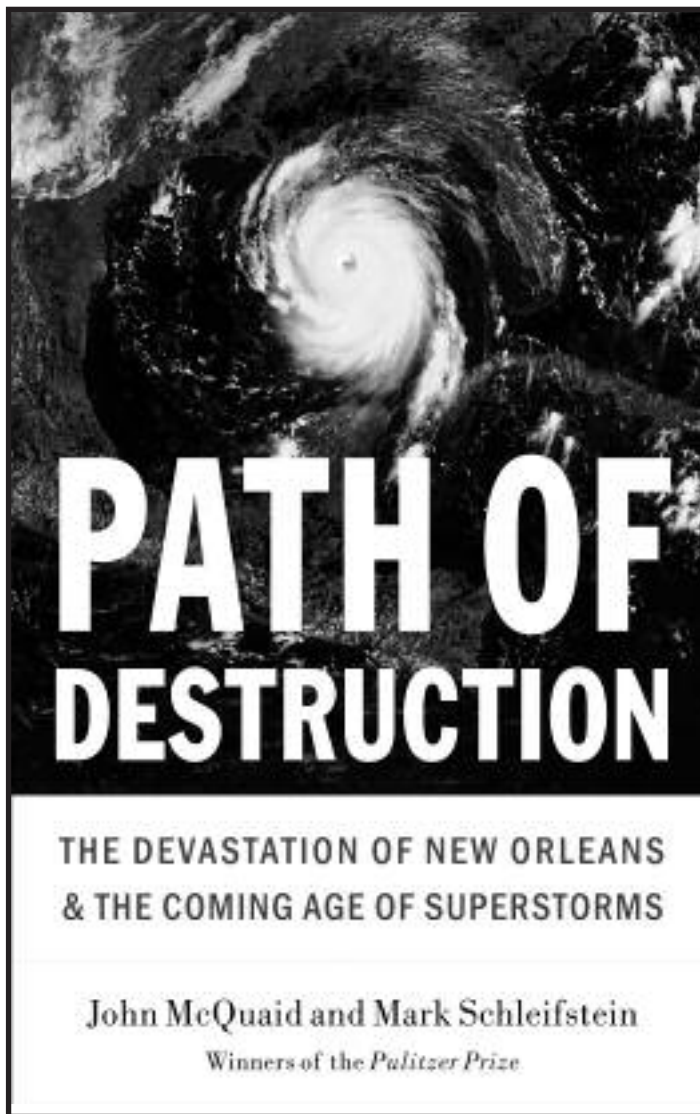
Likewise, author Mike Tidwell, who has written five books about travel and nature, did a bit of Katrina foreshadowing with his 2003 book, "Bayou Farewell: The Rich Life and Tragic Death of Louisiana's Cajun Coast."

"Ravaging Tide," written in clear and breezy prose, uses Katrina more as a backdrop than a focal point. Tidwell, founder and director of the U.S. Climate Emergency Council, based near

his home in Takoma Park, Md., seems more on a mission of educating the public about global warming.

Now admittedly a strong-willed environmental advocate, Tidwell is more far-reaching in his attempt to make a connection between climate change and Katrina than McQuaid and Schleifstein are in their analysis.

More hurricanes and less coastal land are in his forecast, much of which he says is culled from and acknowledged by top Bush Administration scientists as fact, even if White House poli-



cy actions don't seem quite as much in sync with the findings. Another decade of procrastination, Tidwell says, could lead to having much of Florida and lower Manhattan being under water in 75 years as more icebergs melt and oceans keep rising.

Tidwell offers no easy solutions. But he shows how homeowners can save energy and embrace alternative power, therefore reducing the amount of carbon dioxide gases entering the air.

None of the authors accept the status quo as a viable option.

(Continued next page)

## Bookshelf... (from page 25)

But Tidwell, especially, is adamant about pushing the Kyoto agreement on reducing emissions worldwide or taking other actions to instigate meaningful changes.

*Tom Henry is a veteran environmental reporter for the Toledo (Ohio) Blade.*



**This guide sorts science, mostly for consumers**

**WHAT'S TOXIC, WHAT'S NOT**  
**By Dr. Gary Ginsberg and Brian Toal**  
**Berkley Trade, \$15**

**Reviewed by DOUGLAS FISCHER**

It was Cleveland, 1994. Nine infants were in the hospital with a rare case of lung hemorrhaging.

A tenth had died. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, scrambling to find a cause, looked at the water damage in the kids' homes and fingered a common toxin-containing mold, *Stachybotrys atra*.

It was the birth of "toxic mold," and the news media took off after the story like hounds chasing a fox.

Only the CDC couldn't verify the link.

The agency retracted its findings three years later. In 2004, the National Academy of Sciences couldn't find a link between mold and toxic effects.

The media hounds couldn't be bothered, so perhaps it's no surprise that the first hit on a Google search today for "toxic mold" yields a site dedicated to "one of the most devastating national health hazards of this millennium."

The misplaced worry is enough to drive a public health scientist nuts. Which is part of what led to "What's Toxic, What's Not," a new book by two Connecticut Department of Public Health scientists who strive to filter junk science from real worries in the world of environmental hazards.

It's a good premise for a book, given the confusion out there.

The authors are Dr. Gary Ginsberg, a toxicologist and adjunct instructor at Yale University's School of Medicine, and Brian Toal, who supervises Connecticut's Environmental and Occupational Health Assessment Program.

They waste no time laying out what they see as the top myths, risks and uncertainties plaguing consumers today. The rest of the book lays out the case for why: Worry about dioxin, mercury and radon is justified; concern over tap water and pesticide residues in food is not; and some precaution with cosmetics is justified. Throughout, the authors sprinkle little case studies – frustratingly anonymous, but interesting nonetheless – and info-boxes contrasting popular myths with reality.

I read the book hoping it would clear the spin and help me prioritize a complicated and controversial part of my beat. It doesn't, but that's perhaps too lofty a goal. What Ginsberg and Toal offer, however, is calm, methodical, refreshingly understated perspective. The prose can be plodding. But every so often they offer up a little gem.

Take fluoride. I rolled my eyes when I saw the section: Are we still debating this? Then I read about fluorosis, the spotty, lacy white discoloration of teeth in children caused by excess fluoride. Turns out it's permanent. Who knew? Thus, Ginsberg and Toal write, "It's important for parents to make sure their children are not eating toothpaste or swallowing the rinse."

Does any pre-schooler spit out their toothpaste? Now my kids aren't using as much toothpaste as they did last month.

But what I wanted from "What's Toxic" were numbers. How much toothpaste would my kids have to swallow to risk fluorosis, given typical municipal fluoridation levels? How big a gap in dioxin contamination exists between farm-raised and wild fish? How much dioxin do you need before it starts hacking into your

DNA, and what concentration would I likely find in my veins? The book is silent. And that is its flaw.

The authors tackle one scary item after another in broad, general terms. Adhesives contain harmful volatile organic compounds, they warn, but the information necessary to make your own risk assessment never arrives: "While the amount of adhesive used is typically small," they write, "its components should make you handle these products with a healthy dose of respect and caution."

Recent work on low-dose exposure to bisphenol-A, phthalates, perfluorinated acids gets similar treatment. "The key," Ginsberg and Toal write of PFOS and PFOA, long-lasting chemicals that contaminate us all yet are necessary for the manufacture of stick- and stain-resistant products, "is to not take in any more than necessary." Sound advice, to be sure. But what is necessary? The lack of any real numbers or data is really frustrating. You can't make any sort of educated risk assessment.

This is not a book for journalists looking to prioritize their coverage or find fresh new angles on the environmental health beat. It is a book for consumers baffled by the conflicting reports we've filed over the years. That it exists at all is a clear sign we're not doing our jobs.

*Douglas Fischer covers the environment for the Oakland Tribune and other Bay Area dailies owned by MediaNews. His (Continued next page)*





series on environmental contaminants earned an award of merit in the inaugural Grantham Prize for Environmental Journalism.

For a good primer on environmental health risks, Fischer suggests a different book, “Generations at Risk (MIT Press, 1999),” by Ted Schettler, Gina Solomon, Maria Valenti and Annette Huddle.



### **An indictment of big-box stores and sprawl**

**BIG-BOX SWINDLE: THE TRUE COST OF MEGA-RETAILERS AND THE FIGHT FOR AMERICA’S INDEPENDENT BUSINESSES**

By Stacy Mitchell  
Beacon Press, \$24.95

**Reviewed by JENNIFER WEEKS**

Wal-Mart is offering some really big buys in Iowa this season – ten of its own stores, totaling over 560,000 square feet. It might sound as though the company is liquidating, but Stacy Mitchell argues in “Big-Box Swindle” that it’s standard practice for mega-retailers to close existing stores and build bigger ones in the same area. It’s part of what Mitchell describes as a development arms race, in which big-box companies build more stores to lure business away from existing retailers. “You do it bigger than the other guy and just knock him out of the market,” one retail analyst tells her.

This is an environmental story because big-box retailing is a major driver of suburban sprawl. Vacant big-box stores and malls (many driven out of business by mega-retailers) are so common nationwide that they are referred to as “greyfields.” Mitchell, a senior researcher with the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, estimates that there may be a billion square feet of greyfields across the United States. They symbolize how big-box retailers make profits: by building as many stores in as many locations as possible.

This approach consumes vast quantities of land: a Wal-Mart Supercenter covers about 220,000 square feet, five times the footprint of a standard supermarket, with a 15-acre parking lot. As large chain retail centers spread, shoppers spend more time driving between them. This increases auto emissions and creates local dirty air hotspots around retail centers. Runoff from strip malls and mega-store parking lots carries surface contaminants like motor oil, pesticides, and road salt into lakes and rivers. Ports that receive and ship goods from overseas factories to superstores’ U.S. distribution centers are also major air pollution centers.

This book is a valuable read for anyone who covers growth and development or the impacts of large businesses like Wal-Mart, Target, and Home Depot. Mitchell’s biggest message is that big-box development is driven by public policies, such as zoning codes and tax laws that let big retailers shelter profits (but make independent businesses pay higher rates). And, she says, we can

change those rules. Mitchell cites communities across the nation that have adopted store-size caps, restricted areas where superstores can build, and required new retail proposals to pass economic- and community-impact analyses. In short, host communities have more control than they may think.

This book also throws new light on some mega-retailers’ efforts to woo environmentally-conscious customers. Mitchell doesn’t address this point, but it’s hard to see superstores as even pale green after reading “Big-Box Swindle.” Given the physical

impacts of building a big-box store and paving acres for parking, how much credit should they get for using recyclable packaging? Is it a good thing that Wal-Mart is starting to sell organic food, or will it undercut competitors and bully suppliers as it has in other sectors?

This book is feisty, and controversial. Several publishers passed on it because they were afraid of promoting a book that criticized Barnes & Noble and Borders, their biggest customers (“Our publisher shut it down immediately – didn’t want to bite the hand that feeds it,” one agent wrote to Mitchell). Buy it at your local independent bookstore.

*Jennifer Weeks is a freelance writer in Watertown, Massachusetts.*



### **The computer industry’s dark impact on workers, others**

**CHALLENGING THE CHIP: LABOR RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN THE GLOBAL ELECTRONICS INDUSTRY**

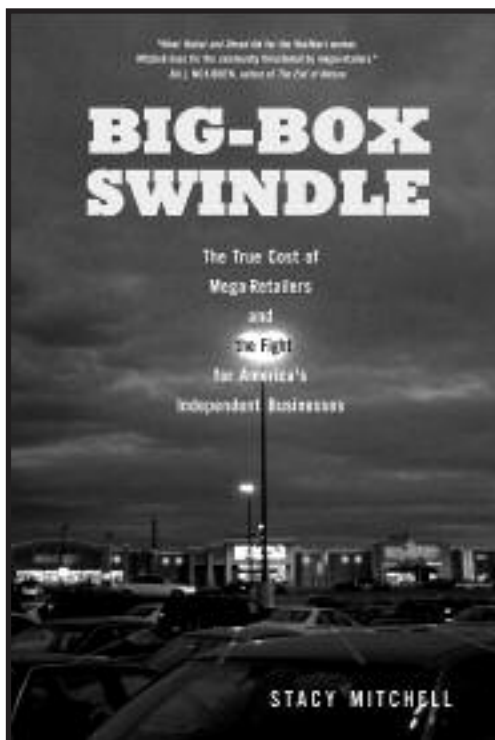
Edited by David Sonnenfeld, David Naguib Pello, Ted Smith  
Temple University, \$25.95 (paper)

**Reviewed by SUSAN MORAN**

The names Helen Clark and James Moore may not ring a bell like the names Andrew Grove and Bill Gates. But they are also pioneers in the modern computer industry. They are among the unsung mavericks and heroes who exposed the darker side of electronics. This is the side that emits hundreds of toxins like the ones that appeared to kill Moore and other industry workers. Corporate silence or outright denial about these toxins – including lead, mercury, hexavalent chromium, cadmium, and polybrominated flame retardants – galvanized workers to battle companies such as National Semiconductor, IBM, Intel Corp. and Dell Computer for chemical disclosure and compensation for workers with illnesses.

“Challenging the Chip: Labor Rights and Environmental Justice in the Global Electronics Industry,” a collection of essays, describes the darker side of the computer electronics industry. The power of the book is that it tells several stories about workers who devoted their lives to expose corporate wrongdoings and fight for legislative and other reforms/corrections. But the book

*(Continued next page)*



## Bookshelf... (from page 27)

doesn't stop at corporate wrongdoing. It speaks of positive steps – some taken after activists brought pressure – that companies like Hewlett-Packard and Dell have taken toward recycling and reusing their computers, printers and other products.

The book publishes the work of activists as well as academics – a rarity, especially for a university publisher. The editors are David Sonnenfeld, an associate professor of community and rural sociology at Washington State University, David Naguib Pello, an associate professor of ethnic studies at the University of California, San Diego and Ted Smith, founder of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition.

Smith started the toxics coalition in 1982 and he is probably responsible for much of what we now know about the dark side of the so-called clean industry. His wife, Mandy Hawes, a Silicon Valley attorney, has represented many workers in pivotal lawsuits against IBM and other manufacturers after suffering illnesses, and in some cases, deaths, related to their prolonged exposure to chemicals.

The book comes on the heels of Elizabeth Grossman's "High-Tech Trash: Digital Devices, Hidden Toxics, and Human Health" (Island Press), published earlier this year. Her book gave an overview of a range of problems stemming from the life cycle of consumer electronics products – including the leaching of lead, mercury and arsenic from landfills into water tables.

"Challenging the Chip" puts a human face on these problems.

One case involves Helen Clark, an employee at a semiconductor factory in Greenock, Scotland, owned by U.S.-based National Semiconductor. Clark spearheaded a grassroots group that ultimately influenced Scottish occupational health authorities to conduct the world's first epidemiological study of semiconductor workers. The study, announced in 2001, found higher than expected incidences of certain types of cancer among National Semiconductor workers.

## President... (from page 2)

and Excellence in Journalism Foundation, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. It will give us fifty cents for every dollar we raise for our endowment between now and May 31, 2007, up to a total of \$103,000.

But we only get the full \$51,500 match if we raise enough from members and friends. Again, we're off to a good start, but the deadline's coming up fast. If you've given before, please consider increasing your donation this year, so it will be eligible for the match. And if you've never given before, this is your time to rise to the challenge – every dollar you give will be enhanced by 50 percent.

If you've ever turned to SEJ-Talk for help with a story, read *SEJournal*, or searched the website for background or contacts, if

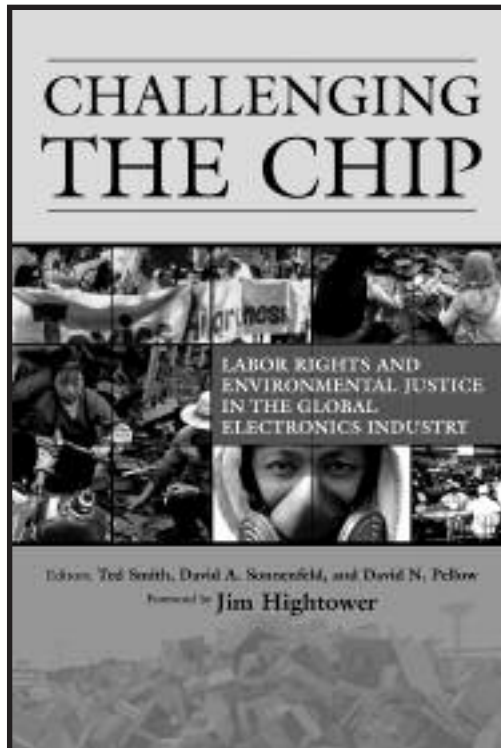
Another case centers on two clean-room employees, James Moore and Alida Hernandez, in IBM's disk-drive plant in San Jose, Calif. The two filed suit against IBM, charging that the occupational exposures to solvents and carcinogenic compounds used in the manufacturing processes caused Moore's non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and Hernandez's breast cancer. Moore died in 2004. The jury decided in favor of IBM. The lawsuit is one of more than 200 cases brought by IBM workers for chemical poisoning that resulted in cancer and other chronic diseases. Fifty more cases have been filed by children of IBM workers born with disabling birth defects.

The book also highlights several accounts of occupational illnesses in India, China, Thailand and other countries. In one account, a Taiwanese man named Bon-Tsu Liu recounts how his wife died of breast cancer after 11 years at an RCA factory handling disposal buckets that had contained plastic materials and organic solvents. One of their daughters died at the age of 3 from hepa-

toblastoma. Mr. Liu believed that both illnesses were caused by his wife's exposure to toxic compounds, although RCA never claimed responsibility for those or other illnesses. But in 1994 Taiwanese lawmakers revealed that residents living near the RCA plant suffered an unusually high rate of cancer linked to RCA's pollution. More than 1,000 former RCA workers have developed various forms of cancer and tumors, according to the chapter's author, Yu-Ling Ku, who cited medical studies.

"Challenging the Chip" is not a gripping page turner but it is an important work in chronicling the evolution of grassroots activism, corporate denial, and eventually, in some cases, corporate responsibility in the electronics industry.

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



you've been mentored or entered the contest – and especially if you've been to a conference, with all its tours, workshops and supportive camaraderie – you know the good that SEJ does through its talented staff and generous, gifted volunteer members. Please do your part now to ensure that SEJ is around, no matter how changed the media landscape, to help journalists keep chasing those stories that really matter.

And who knows? They might get hooked for life on covering the environment, just as I was so very long ago.

*Tim Wheeler, SEJ's newly elected president, reports on growth and development for The Baltimore Sun.*

# Reporters focus on waste sites, near and far away

By MIKE DUNNE

Freelancer **Sara Shipley Hiles** took a story she had worked on locally as a newspaper writer and expanded it into an international magazine story for *Mother Jones*.

It was just one of hundreds of environmental stories written and broadcast over the past three months.

“In the mountains of Peru, a smoke-stack towers over a bustling city of one-room tin houses, where women carry babies on their backs and hang laundry to dry in the wind. On another continent, in a small Missouri town clinging to the bank of the Mississippi River, more gray lead dust rains down from another gray smelter,” said the lead of the story in the magazine’s November/December issue written by Hiles and Marina Walker Guevara.

The two cities, separated by some 3,000 miles and different cultures, share hosting one company and one mineral being unearthed from the ground. La Oroya, Peru and Herculaneum, Mo. are home to lead smelters operated by the Doe Run Co.

The St. Louis-based firm expanded abroad at a time it also faced more scrutiny and regulation in the United States. Ninety-nine percent of La Oroya’s children are lead-poisoned – a price some families think they have to pay to put food on the table, the story said.

Hiles wrote about the Herculaneum problem while a staff writer for the *St. Louis Dispatch*, and then expanded the story for *Mother Jones*. See the story at: [www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2006/11/lead\\_astroy.html](http://www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2006/11/lead_astroy.html)

The story was one of many focusing on pollution in the past three months.

On Sept. 3, **Phil Ferolito** of the *Yakima Herald-Republic* wrote about the impact of mercury-tainted fish on Native Americans in the area. “Yakama tribal member Johnny Jackson figures he eats fish at least twice a day. Maybe more. While mercury and other toxins found in Columbia River fish may be putting him at risk, he refuses to abandon tribal tradition,” Ferolito wrote.

Mercury, a long-lasting chemical that

accumulates in the food chain, can cause neurological damage, learning disabilities and memory loss, he wrote. Some Indians eat 10 times more fish than non-Indians

**Sandy Bauers** of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* wrote on Oct. 17 about a Pennsylvania regulatory board approving a plan to cut mercury emissions from coal-



Courtesy of SARA SHIPLEY HILES

**Cristian Balbin, a lead-poisoned child, with his mother in La Oroya, Peru. Freelancer Sara Shipley Hiles wrote about the effects of lead smelters, owned by St. Louis-based Doe Run Co., in Missouri and La Oroya for *Mother Jones*.**

and the impact on their health remains unknown. “The question is: How much is too much?” Ferolito said.

A week later, in the Sept. 11 edition of *TIME* magazine, writer **Jeffery Fluger** also wrote about mercury. “A series of recent studies and surveys suggests that the potentially deadly metal is nearly everywhere – and more dangerous than most of us appreciated,” he wrote.

fired power plants by 90 percent over nine years. Utilities and coal companies opposed the plan, which is stricter than federal limits proposed by the Bush administration.

**Darryl R. Isherwood** of the *Trenton (N.J.) Times* wrote Oct. 23 about a group of legislators seeking to require state health officials to regulate indoor contamination at day-care centers, schools and residential

(Continued next page)



## Beat... (from page 29)

developments. The move was inspired by one day-care center which operated for two years on the site of a former Franklinville thermometer factory. Testing earlier this year revealed dangerous mercury levels in the air. The center was closed in July and the Department of Environmental Protection announced it will inspect some of the 4,200 day-care centers throughout the state for signs of contamination.

**Jeff Nesmith** of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* wrote on Nov. 11 about efforts to get the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to tighten federal limits on ozone, or smog, in the country's air. "The agency's scientific advisers on air quality issues last month urged EPA Administrator Steve Johnson to reduce ozone limits by at least 12 percent, and said even that level would endanger the health of persons with asthma, especially children," he wrote.

The chair of the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee said EPA's scientific

staff had concluded that there was no "scientific justification for retaining the current" standard, which was set in 1997, Nesmith wrote.

**Candace Page** of the *Burlington (Vt.) Free Press* reported Nov. 5 that Gov. Jim Douglas and others are critical of International Paper's plan to test burn tires in place of fuel oil at a mill that manufactures high-quality white office paper. They said emissions will contain tiny particles of soot and heavy metals, endangering human health.

A few weeks later, **Darren M. Allen** of the *Vermont Press Bureau* reported in the *Rutland Herald* that after five days of test burns using shredded tires in the plant's giant power boilers, the company called the effort to a halt because pollution control equipment was not completely cleaning up emissions of particulate matter.

Land issues continued to be an important topic.

**Peter Friederici** wrote the cover

story for the Oct. 30 edition of *High Country News* about the conflicts over national forests in New Mexico. Once-warring environmentalists and rural communities that made their livings from the surrounding forests have now made peace "thanks to an innovative federal program that provides small grants to jump-start community-based forest restoration projects. Both sides hope the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program will form the basis for a sustainable forestry industry in the state, Friederici wrote.

The program requires grantees to put together a working coalition of stakeholders – including loggers, environmentalists, and community groups – who must collaborate in order to successfully propose and implement restoration projects, he said.

**Ashley Ahearn** of "Living on Earth" aired a story on the problems and potential of wetlands mitigation banks used to help reduce the loss of important habitat.

*(Continued next page)*

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Ahearn reported:

"The goal of wetland banking is no net loss of wetlands. So, if one company restores some wetlands, it's okay if another company destroys others, as long as the total acreage of wetlands in a state doesn't decrease." But critics say that equation just doesn't add up; wetlands should never be intentionally destroyed. And while some wetland banks have been termed a success, not all mitigation banks work well. Read the transcript and listen to the Nov. 3 story at: [www.loe.org/shows/segments.htm?programID=06-P13-00044&segmentID=2](http://www.loe.org/shows/segments.htm?programID=06-P13-00044&segmentID=2)

**Elizabeth Bluemink** of the *Anchorage Daily News* wrote on Oct. 8 about a company pursuing a massive gold and copper mine in Southwest Alaska that recently furnished the state with a proposal for earthen dams so large that some Alaskans are comparing them to the biggest dams in the world. "The concept calls for a series of dams that would fill in some valleys and a lake with more than a billion tons of tailings. The potential mine is highly controversial due to its location in the salmon-rich Bristol Bay watershed."

Read the story at [www.adn.com/front/story/8282010p-8178489c.html](http://www.adn.com/front/story/8282010p-8178489c.html).

Global climate change continues to be a hot topic.

On Sept. 3, **Randy Lee Loftis** of the *Dallas Morning News* wrote about how Texas "is as much a global warming culprit as it is a victim. Already No. 1 among all U.S. states in greenhouse gas emissions and seventh worldwide – emitting more than Canada or the United Kingdom – Texas could be about to sanction enormous increases in the carbon dioxide it sends into the atmosphere."

Loftis said the approval of 16 new power plants that burn coal would add an estimated 117 million tons of carbon dioxide a year, more than the individual emissions from 33 other states and 177 countries.

By Nov. 18, Loftis was writing about how utility company TXU outlined its plans to cut emissions by 20 percent while building 11 new coal-burning power units.

Water issues, as always, made news.

South Florida may join the ranks of areas considering replenishing underground sources of drinking water by discharging treated sewage into canals, according to a story by **David Fleshler** of the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*. "The county's environmental staff has drafted a proposal to lower water-quality standards

for canals so they could accept highly treated sewage without exceeding legal pollution levels," he wrote on Nov. 3.

Just a few days before, **Karen Dillon** of the *Kansas City Star* wrote about pollution in two streams. Citing a recent six-year study by the U.S. Geological Survey, the streams and their tributaries "can be cesspools that some experts say are dangerous not only to wildlife but also to humans who wade or fish. The study showed that levels of E. coli and fecal coliform in the Blue River and Indian Creek can be 1,000 times greater than state rules permit during and after heavy rains, especially in summer months." The added concentration of nutrients can harm fish and plants, she wrote.

**Naomi Lubick** of *Environmental Science & Technology* reported Oct. 24 that reports of a "toxic soup" caused by the flooding of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina apparently were off the mark. "A year after the disaster, scientists from the U.S. Geological Survey and elsewhere conclude that the water that coursed through the city and the soils that remain hold few surprises. They say that most contamination that could pose concerns lingered in urban areas since before the hurricane," Lubick wrote.

**Matthew Brown** of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* wrote Oct. 16 about the possibility of using sewage effluent to rebuild marshes damaged by 2005 hurricanes Katrina and Rita. "Tens of millions of gallons of treated sewage from New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish would be pumped into severely eroded coastal marshes to the east of the city under a plan to revitalize 10,000 acres of wetlands by giving them a nutrient-rich jolt of wastewater." The \$40 million project would create the largest wetlands treatment system of its kind in the world, he reported.

**Launce Rake** of the *Las Vegas Sun* wrote about the impact of sewage effluent on sexual development of fish in Lake Mead. While the U.S. Geological Survey released a new four-page summary of more than a decade of studies linking wastewater to such changes, "a scientist who has studied the issue for years complains that the report understates the danger of those toxins at Lake Mead and elsewhere. The researcher had aired his concerns seven months ago – shortly after he was fired by the USGS." The story ran Oct. 20.

**Dan Egan** of the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* wrote a three-part series,

"Troubled Waters," on efforts to keep the Asian Carp out of Lake Michigan and the Great Lakes. The big fish would join invaders such as zebra mussels, alewives, sea lampreys and gobies – all are among the 182 Great Lakes foreign species "that are steadily strangling what's left of native fish populations," Egan wrote in the first installment, which ran Oct. 14.

The fall television "sweeps" rating period produced a few environmentally focused investigative reports by local television stations. **Nashville's KTVD Newschannel 5** looked at railcars full of lethal chlorine, anhydrous ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, and liquid propane that sit unguarded at sidings in densely populated U.S. urban areas like Nashville. The FBI said they could become terrorist targets. At industry urging, the main federal response since Sept. 11 terrorist attacks seems to be efforts to prevent cities from protecting their own residents, the station reported on Nov. 15.

**Steven Dean** of KPRC of Houston aired a story about how potential homebuyers were not being told about houses on lots in the area contaminated with a plume of cancer-causing dichloroethane from a botched hazardous-waste site cleanup. The sellers are not telling buyers and state environmental agencies have a policy of keeping the information secret, despite legal requirements that such information be disclosed. The story aired Nov. 13.

Reporters covering the environment wrote stories that showed the wide-range of the topic.

**Matt McKinney** of the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* wrote an Oct. 28 story about a new construction supply company in town. It offers plywood made from sunflower seed shells, non-toxic paint, kitchen countertops made from recycled paper, bamboo flooring, glass tiles made from recycled bottles and handcrafted sinks made from recycled aluminum. The products are free of harmful chemicals and toxins and in many cases are recycled or made from reusable materials.

**Denis Cuff** of the *Contra Costa Times* in California wrote on Oct. 23 about a study that shows Bay Area neighborhoods near freeways and ports are exposed to the largest volumes of diesel soot, the region's top air pollutant for creating cancer risks. Trucks on freeways are likely a big contributor, according to the study.

Cuff outlined the preliminary findings  
(Continued next page)

## Beat... (from page 31)

from the first phase of the study by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

**Andy Grimm** of the *Post-Tribune* of Merrillville, Ind. wrote about the long history of a waste dump in his community. "State environmental officials had a hint the Feddeler landfill was a hazardous waste site the first time they stepped onto the 40-acre landfill more than 30 years ago. The first report on file with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, dated 1975, notes that workers were burying drums that might have contained toxic acrylonitrile, pesticides and other waste as the inspector watched," he wrote on Oct. 22.

On Oct. 17, **Jeff Alexander** wrote in the *Kalamazoo Gazette* about the U.S. Coast Guard's plan to establish 34 live-fire weapons-training zones on the Great Lakes. The plan would make the Guard one of the largest sources of the toxic metal lead entering the lakes, according to federal data.

**Tracy Davis** of the *Ann Arbor (Mich.) News* wrote about concerns that a deep gravel pit mining operation will drain local wells and perhaps a 200-acre lake 12 miles outside of town. Barrett Paving Materials Inc. plans a sand and

gravel mine that some say will be one of the largest, deepest gravel pits in the region. Critics say it will damage groundwater and possibly surface water supplies, opponents said. The story ran Oct. 15.

**Mike Keller** of the *Biloxi (Miss.) Sun Herald* reported Oct. 14 that a recent DuPont study confirmed a chemical commonly found in the environment and humans all over the world, PFOA, is present at similar low levels in the people and environment around Pascagoula. Samples were collected prior to the start of an operation that will strip the PFOA from another chemical used in the company's line of water- and grease-resistant surface coatings and food packaging. "It was what we expected to find," said Donald Schar, DuPont's First Chemical Corporation environmental manager.

**Ben Shouse** of the *Argus Leader* of Sioux Falls, S.D. wrote an Oct. 21 story about threats to prairie potholes, some of the best waterfowl breeding habitat. Conservationists are striking a new deal to preserve more than 10,000 South Dakota wetland acres, he wrote. The story can be read at: [www.argusleader.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061021/NEWS03/610210347/1009](http://www.argusleader.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061021/NEWS03/610210347/1009)

On Nov. 2, **Kevin Wilson** wrote in the *Portales (N.M.) News-Tribune* about plans for a 100-million-gallon-per-year ethanol plant near Muleshoe that proposes to use a billion pounds of cow manure a year in the production of vehicle fuel. A Panda Energy spokesman called the Muleshoe area the "Saudi Arabia of cattle manure."

In the October issue of *Texas Parks and Wildlife*, freelance writer **Wendee Holtcamp** wrote about how introduced species were breeding with the native Guadalupe bass, driving the species to extinction.

**Tom Palmer** of the *Lakeland (Fla.) Ledger* wrote on Oct. 9 about the fate of 36 endangered species that cling to existence in scattered tracts along the Lake Wales Ridge "that have somehow escaped the bulldozer or the plow." A recent report recommended additional land purchases as well as more funding for management and research to help improve the rare species' chances of survival.

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*Mike Dunne is assistant editor of the SEJournal. He writes for The Advocate in Baton Rouge, La.*

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