

SEJ Journal

The Quarterly Publication of the Society of Environmental Journalists

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Developing credibility is key in local nuclear-plant coverage

BY TOM HENRY

America has 103 nuclear plants.

Chances are, especially if you work east of the Mississippi River, there's one in your circulation area or one close enough to pose a risk.

How close must it be to pose a risk, consider this: Scientists believe the radioactive fallout from the 1986 explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor near Kiev, Russia was still conceivably strong enough to cause or exacerbate a few cases of cancer in the Pacific Northwest. That's just another reminder that we're all one planet.

You know about America's energy needs. You might know that nuclear power provides 20 percent of our energy now and is second only to that from coal-fired power plants. You may have heard about the nuclear industry's eagerness for a renaissance and the battles on Capitol Hill.

So what's a good way to cover nuclear power, you ask?

Fundamentally, it's like anything else: You educate yourself, learn who to trust, stay neutral and hold people accountable.

You remain humble enough to learn more and maintain an insatiable curiosity. You decipher jargon and write eloquently. You separate science from politics while recognizing that both exist. You write with flair and passion without getting flippant or suckered into pure emotion.

You think globally and write locally. You tell people why it matters.

Got it?

Oh, yes, and one more thing.

You wish for luck.

My biggest nuclear story has been the near-rupture of northern Ohio's Davis-Besse nuclear plant reactor head in 2002, the industry's biggest event since half the core of Three Mile Island Unit 2 in Pennsylvania melted in 1979.

Davis-Besse's owner, FirstEnergy Corp., admittedly had been so focused on profits as deregulation emerged in the 1990s that it let errant reactor acid burn the plant's six-inch-thick steel lid down to the width of a pencil eraser.

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Inside Story:

Web publication uses data to tell complex air-toxics story

By MIKE DUNNE

A visit to a boot camp before the last Society of Environmental Journalists conference in Vermont opened the door for a special report on air pollution in San Diego by a web-only publication, voiceofsandiego.org

Reporter Rob Davis, who covers environmental issues for the Internet-based nonprofit news outlet, gives lots of credit to the special training and insights of the boot camp followed up by the annual conference. And, he also got help from fellow SEJ members.

"I'm not just saying this: The story was a testament to the rewards of being an SEJ member," Davis said.

The result of his efforts: "What's in Our Air?" – a two-part series on the big polluters in his community that also included a database where readers could look up emissions in their ZIP code.

While one polluter was not a big surprise – a power plant

– the others were more common, like dry cleaners and gas-line stations.

SEJ Member Dave Poulson, associate director of the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism at Michigan State University, organized the boot camp and then mentored Davis in his project.

Poulson said that he likes the project for its "simplicity and its complexity. It comes across as a story that says, 'this is complicated stuff, but I'm going to explain it to you so that you can grasp it.' There is the ZIP code search that quickly lets a reader find out how many pounds of stuff get spewed nearby. Readers understand that.

"And he has some nifty comparisons, first explaining that one pound of carbon monoxide pollution is enough to violate U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ambient air standards in a cube of air that's 115 feet on each side. Then he explains that

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Help keep SEJ and the environment in the spotlight

By **TIM WHEELER**

The environment has enjoyed a terrific run in “the media” lately. Climate change has pushed onto the front page of newspapers repeatedly in the past year. It’s garnered extended airtime on CNN, Fox and other broadcast outlets, and graced the covers of all kinds of magazines, from *TIME* to *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue* and, most recently, *Sports Illustrated*.

Earlier this year, drowning polar bears and melting glaciers even crowded out celebrities and crime as the top story for a few days when the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its latest update of the scientific evidence.

Then, when “An Inconvenient Truth” grabbed two Oscars shortly thereafter, the environment went Hollywood. The documentary about former Vice President Al Gore and his seemingly lonely quest to awaken the American public to the dangers of global warming had scored big with film critics and the movie-going public alike.

It didn’t take long, of course, for old habits to reassert themselves. Anna Nicole, Britney and others took over the airwaves again and filled way too many pages of print for weeks on end.

It’s easy to despair when such things happen. Sensational, sordid or even silly stories always seem to crowd out serious coverage of important issues like climate change, environmental health and sustainability.

But at least on climate, perhaps, the scale has tipped a bit in the past year. SEJ stalwarts like Seth Borenstein of the AP and Andy Revkin of *The New York Times* have helped keep the issue in the news. So has another SEJer, Michelle Nijhuis, whose writing about climate impacts in the West for *High Country News* was honored recently by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

There’s a new documentary, “Everything’s Cool,” taking up where Al Gore left off and featuring SEJers Heidi Cullen of The Weather Channel, Ross Gelbspan and Bill McKibben, among others. Of course, true to form for this issue, there’s a contrary message being peddled in another film polemic aired recently on British TV, “The Great Global Warming Swindle.” (No SEJers featured in that one that I know of, which no doubt buttresses the argument that climate change is a vast, green conspiracy.)

With environmental news competing for space and air time – and fighting confusion and spin – it’s vital that journalists get the background they need, talk to the right people and use all the media tools available to tell these complex but important stories. That’s what the Society of Environmental Journalists has been about.

Since the beginning of the year, SEJ has stepped up to help make sure reporters have the background and contacts they need to report the climate-change story, with a comprehensive set of

Web links to scientists, research papers and some of the best coverage of the topic aired or published. And in recognition that the climate story is being covered by a lot of non-specialists, we’ve made those links available for free to the public – not just for members only. It’s a work in progress, so I hope you’ll check it out and contribute your references, contacts, or just feedback.

SEJ also joined with the American Society of Newspaper Editors and other journalism groups to co-sponsor a nationwide Freedom-of-Information audit of chemical emergency plans. The results, published during “Sunshine Week” in March, were disturbing, but unsurprising. Less than half the requests to see emergency plans were complied with promptly, with requestors put off

and in some cases quizzed about who they were and why they wanted to see documents that are required by federal law to be public. It’s another example of how SEJ stands up for the rights of journalists, and the public, to know how their representatives are enforcing environmental laws and safeguarding natural resources.

In January and again in March, SEJ members and representatives took part in seminars for regional audiences. In Los Angeles, as part of the SEJ board’s winter meeting, it was an afternoon show-and-tell about using new media to report environmental news. In March, in Colorado, SEJ members joined in a panel discussion about climate change coverage at the American

Bar Association’s environmental law conference.

Those activities are in addition to the usual bevy of programs and services SEJ offers. By the time you’re reading this, the entries should all be in for our sixth annual Awards for Reporting on the Environment, which for the first time will include a 10th category, for student work. Plans are taking shape for another terrific conference in September hosted by Stanford University.

These are among the many ways SEJ supports you and all journalists, not just its members, in covering environmental news. As the news media landscape continues its radical transformation, SEJ is positioned for a starring role as “the source for journalists reporting on the environment.” With fewer training opportunities and less editorial support for all journalists, SEJ’s expertise and resources become increasingly important.

But for SEJ to be there for you, we need you to be there for SEJ. Yes, here comes a pitch for money. Sadly, for all the wonderful volunteer power that makes SEJ’s conferences so exciting and its publications so helpful, the organization can’t provide those levels of service and support without stable funding – something that’s increasingly threatened.

SEJ is in the stretch run now of a special endowment fundraising drive. The group has the opportunity to receive a \$51,500 grant this year, if we can raise \$103,000 in new or increased

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Report from the Society’s President



By
**Tim
Wheeler**

SEJournal

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Editor

Mike Mansur

Assistant Editor

Mike Dunne

Design Editor

Orna Izakson

Section Editors

BookShelf	Elizabeth Bluemink
From Academe	Jan Knight
Media on the Move	Jackleen de la Harpe
On-line Bits & Bytes	Russ Clemings
Reporter's Toolbox	Robert McClure
Science Survey	Cheryl Hogue
SEJ News	Linda Knouse
The Beat	Mike Dunne

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

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

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SEJournal submission deadlines

- Summer 2007.....May 1, 2007
- Fall 2007.....August 1, 2007
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- Spring 2008.....February 1, 2008

E-journalists may fit well into complex, converged media future

By **BUD WARD**

Today's environmental journalists are exploring a range of pressing issues including some serious contenders for "story of the century" even before the century is into its teens.

Considering solely the climate change issue, they face the challenge of making sense of and making immediate – in clear, and concise language without hype or hopelessness – the science, economics, and enormous consequences even though most of their audience (and an even higher percentage of their editors?) has yet to appreciate the problem's existence. Other aspects of their beat present their own daunting challenges.

And they're working in a period of enormous change and upheaval in the very institutions that long have been their personal life rafts – providing little things like a regular paycheck, health benefits, and financial security for their families and themselves. Maybe even a bit of peace of mind or personal fulfillment.

Consider a few recent headlines hinting of the challenges facing journalism as many of us long have known it:

- "A Newspaper Chain Sees Its Future, and It's Online and Hyper-local" (Gannett);
- "Have Camera-Phone? Yahoo and Reuters Want You to Work for Their News Service";
- "In Tough Times a Redesigned Journal" (prompting the line "The Small Street Journal");
- "Billionaires and Broadsheets";
- "In Trying Times, Papers Retreat from Washington" (and, of course, foreign bureaus);
- "Scripps Might Split Off Its Newspaper Operations" (leading to a 3.8 percent climb in stock price that day);
- "Newspapers Set to Jointly Sell Ads on Web Sites" (Gannett, McClatchy, and Tribune);
- "Beyond News – Journalists worry about how the Web threatens the way they distribute their product. They are slower to see how it threatens the product itself";
- "Is Convergence the Next Media Disaster?"

The list goes on. And on and on. Let's delve into the insights below just one of those headlines, the "Beyond News" headline of N.Y.U. Journalism Professor Mitchell Stephens's provocative piece in the January/February 2007 *Columbia Journalism Review*.

"News now not only arrives astoundingly fast from an astounding number of directions, it arrives free of charge," Stephens writes. "Selling what is elsewhere available free is difficult, even if it isn't nineteen hours stale. Just ask an encyclopedia salesman, if you can find one."

Stephens's prescription: Journalists "could try to sell something besides news."

He writes that "the sun is setting" on the days of mass production and distribution of "news." He cautions: For those stub-

bornly clinging to the hope that their ability to "collect and organize facts will continue to make them indispensable...the dismal prophesy currently being proclaimed by their circulation and demographic charts may very well be fulfilled."

A ray of hope here? Mainstream media and reporters can provide added value by offering "thoughtful, incisive attempts to divine the significance of events – insights, not just information...to choose a not very journalistic-sounding word, wisdom."

Foreseeing an era of "news analysis organizations" rather than merely "news organizations," Stephens sees a day, and soon, when

"being fast with the analysis is as important as being fast with the news has been for the last hundred years....We will require many more journalists who, when occasion demands, are better than their sources, journalists who are impeccably informed."

Does it sound a bit like a clarion call to environmental journalists? It should.

For SEJ members, it means serious reporters covering environmental issues in "mainstream" media must now study the profound changes going on all around them in the very nature of journalism in the 21st Century. They'll have to understand the changes in the business culture of journalism just as they do the very issues that make them "environmental journalists" in the first place. To the mounting responsibilities they newly are carrying in their news rooms, add this big one: Stay abreast of changes in the business of journalism and information exchange.

No small task. All talk and no walk?

Don't tell that to the *San Jose Mercury News'* veteran reporter Paul Rogers, one of the nation's

most intriguing, most widely respected and, perhaps, most unconventional journalists on the MSM print environmental beat.

Rogers now works four days a week as environmental reporter with the *Mercury News* and 20 hours a week as Managing Editor – that is, employee – of KQED's new "Quest" 30-minute prime-time weekly.

He sees his newspaper/public broadcasting experiment – a variation on what some call newsroom "convergence" – as one that can demonstrate that "science and environment on TV and radio can be exciting and adventuresome."

"We're trying to make it a discovery," he says of this new multimedia journalism partnership. "This is not about taking your cod liver oil."

Needless to say, there are big differences between covering the environmental and science beats for a daily newspaper and covering it for radio and particularly public TV broadcasts that won't air for three months. But it's some of the similarities that most impress Rogers so far. Admitting some initial trepidation in moving from the "serious" print media to the "light" broadcast media (yes, even public broadcasting), Rogers says his experience has taught him that "the people up there are real profession-

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E-Reporting Biz



By
**Bud
Ward**

The future of newspapers: Websites, TV reports and more

By **JEFF BURNSIDE**

The intensifying drive to maximize newspaper websites means print reporters may get pulled in several new directions.

What's more, they'll be expected to do more in the same amount of time for no additional pay, and face the looming possibility of doing something akin to television news reporting – with little or no training.

So why are some leading environmental journalists embracing all this?

"I'm not afraid of taking on more work," says Ken Weiss of the *Los Angeles Times*, "if it will reach more people in a way that makes them pay attention."

These are some key points from a reporters' panel, "Telling the Environment Story with New Technologies," sponsored by the Society of Environmental Journalists at the *Los Angeles Times* in January, moderated by acclaimed television news reporter Judy Muller, now with USC Annenberg. With several *Times* news managers listening, some leading examples were presented:

• **Dina Cappiello of the *Houston Chronicle*: "In Harm's Way"**

Cappiello showed how her team of more than a dozen staffers created for Chron.com an entire new dimension to her series "In Harm's Way" exposing the toxic air pollution problem in Houston. Readers could listen to audio clips from Cappiello herself, as well as her guest appearances on English and Spanish radio. Readers could type in their location and see a "hyper local" analysis as well as biographies of affected people nearby. The five-part series included more than a dozen articles that, when transformed onto the web, became a juggernaut to change public policy. www.chron.com/content/chronicle/special/04/toxic/index.html

• **Ken Weiss of the *Los Angeles Times*: "Altered Oceans"**

Weiss' Internet project had all the usual inventive ideas: photos, sidebars, interactive designs, links, and more. The most unusual elements were video news reports on several topics that allowed readers a new way of looking at the work of a print journalist, guided by video editor John Vandewege. The series traveled the globe examining how humans are changing the very chemistry of the planet's oceans and threatening the health of the planet. www.latimes.com/oceans

• **Paul Rogers of the *San Jose Mercury News* and KQED: "Quest"**

Rogers is a living, breathing example of a print journalist whose title is morphing. The veteran reporter for the *Mercury News*, Rogers is now also the managing editor of "Quest," a new Northern California television and radio series designed to boost environment and science reporting in broadcasting. Their \$7.7 million budget is fueled by foundation money. The website features three-minute video news reports serving as previews of upcoming television segments. They are voiced by producers rather than the normal on-camera reporters, and must engage the viewer without the benefit of an introduction. www.kqed.org/quest

• **Robert McClure and Lisa Stiffler of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*: "The Sound of Broken Promises"**

McClure and fellow print reporter Lisa Stiffler continue their award-winning focus on saving Puget Sound, the gem of the Pacific Northwest. Their latest web transformation uses all the usual tools as well as a slideshow edited together in an animating video-like report written, with three-dimensional graphics, and voiced by Stiffler. <http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/specials/broken-promises/>

• **Jeff Burnside of WTVJ NBC 6 News, Miami**

WTVJ, owned by NBC, is using laptops in the field in new ways. Cameras shoot on hard drives which are plugged into the laptops for editing. Soon, cell phone cards will transmit completed news reports in broadcast quality back to the newsroom. It means no videotape, no awkward microwave vans, and no satellite dishes straddled atop semi-trucks. A crew can, for example, go deep into the Everglades and file complete stories from remote areas, including live reports. Also, WTVJ recently aired a report about Floridians aboard the Sea Shepherd ship that rammed a Japanese whaler in the Antarctic. Photographers on board used uplinks to send video via satellite to Sea Shepherd web producers who made several two-minute downloads available globally in high resolution to broadcasters hours after it happened. It marked the first time WTVJ used high-resolution web video, properly sourced on screen, for the basis of a news report. www.nbc6.net/news/10975041/detail.html

The panel discussion of technology and the web reflected the changing future of newspapers and, for that matter, delivery of all news. *New York Times* Publisher Arthur Sulzberger was quoted on Haaretz.com saying, "I really don't know whether we'll be printing the *Times* in five years, and you know what? I don't care either." Sulzberger said more people now read The *Times* website than the print version, and that the transition to the web will end the day he stops publishing on paper.

When Cornelia Dean was taking her turn as Science Editor of the *New York Times* several years ago, she was ahead of the game in designating a desk in her department specifically for a web person. Now that Dean is reporting science and the environment again, she's done voiceovers for video slide shows, Podcasts, on-camera talks edited with video and still photos, "anything anyone has ever asked me," she said. "In my opinion we are not asked enough. But, of course, that's a reflection of resources as much as anything else. Everything takes time, staff, money."

Weiss says he never dreamed his newspaper career would lead to doing television-style reporting. "So far, however," warns Weiss, "my editor doesn't take into account the extra time it takes in the field and in the studio to put together a video production."

That newspaper editors are asking print reporters to be
(Continued on page 20)





Books on raising chickens, green burials, plus some awards

By JACKLEEN de LA HARPE

Jan Daniels has a new job as the founder/director of Eco Expressions, an environmental writing program based in San Diego, CA and Hailey, ID, that helps solidify the outdoor experience for students with scientific and creative writing. www.EcoExpressions.org

In January, Scribner released **Mark Harris'** book on green burial, "Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial." See review on page 22.

The book follows some dozen families as they pursue more "natural" burial options for their deceased including interment in backyard graveyards and natural cemeteries, scattering of ashes at sea, the sea burial of memorial "reef balls," and cremation, among others. Harris also details the embalming process and the environmental aftermath of the standard funeral.

Christine Heinrich's first book "How To Raise Chickens" (MBI Publishing, St. Paul, MN, \$19.95) will be released soon. Heinrich says the book includes sections on rare and historic breeds, traditional breeding methods, and information about nat-

ural incubation and hatching chickens. She writes that there are lots of color pictures of beautiful chickens.

Kathleen Regan has contributed a chapter to a book "Creating a Climate for Change: Communicating Climate Change and Facilitating Social Change", eds. Moser, Susanne C. and Lisa Dilling, Cambridge University Press, 2007. Her chapter is titled, "A role for dialogue in communication about climate change." The book is a synthesis that grew out of an interdisciplinary workshop on climate change communication held at NCAR in June 2003. Regan is moving to Germany in February and can be contacted at kath.regan@gmail.com.

Joe Roman's most recent article, "Deep Doo-Doo," profiles Fargo, a detector dog trained to locate whale feces in the Bay of Fundy. Researchers use the samples to study reproduction in the endangered right whale. It appears in *New Scientist's* Festive Issue, Dec. 23-30, 2006. His book

"Whale" (Reaktion Books, 2006) was released in May. Roman is a visiting fellow at the Gund Institute for Ecological Economics at the University of Vermont.

Mike Stark, environmental reporter, the *Billings* (Mont.) *Gazette*, was named 2006 Journalist of the Year by the Suburban Newspapers of America. The award was given for a body of work, including stories about climate change, wolf recovery in the Rocky Mountains, threats by grizzly bears, an outbreak of tree-killing bark beetles, and long-running neglect of contaminated groundwater beneath a Billings neighborhood.

Freelance writer **Jennifer Weeks** has become a contributing writer to *CQ Researcher*, a weekly magazine published by Congressional Quarterly Press. Each issue of *CQR* is a 24-page overview of a single issue in the news. Weeks published her third *CQ Researcher* in January 2007 on factory farms.

Matt Weiser, *The Sacramento Bee*, and coworkers **Deb Kollars**, **Carrie Peyton-Dahlberg** and **Phillip Reese** earned a second place honorable mention from the 2006 John B. Oakes Award for Outstanding Environmental Journalism at Columbia University. The *Bee* reporters were honored for their series "Tempting Fate" on the flood threat in Sacramento and California's Central Valley. The reporters will share a \$1,000 prize. The *Los Angeles Times*, led by reporter **Kenneth R. Weiss**, took first place for its "Altered Oceans" series.

Dan Drollette, Northampton, Mass., freelance writer and **Joy Horowitz**, Santa Monica, Calif., freelance writer are among the 2007 National Tropical Botanical Garden Environmental Journalism Fellows. *SEJournal* editorial board member JoAnn M. Valenti facilitates the annual NTBG program held in May in Kauai.

Alex Wilson's book, "Your Green Home" was recently published by New Society Publishers, 2006.

Media on the Move

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September in Palo Alto. How sweet!

By **CHRIS BOWMAN**

Daffodils in January. Wildfires in February. Bermuda shorts in March.

Like seemingly everything in the environment these days, this year's SEJ annual conference has been scheduled remarkably earlier than usual: Sept. 5-9 at Stanford University.

The coals fueling your Labor Day barbecue will still be glowing as you pack for the pleasant climes of Stanford, heart of California's Silicon Valley.

As your telepathic conference co-chairs, Carolyn Whetzel (California Correspondent, BNA) and I have anticipated all your questions about the event in this handy FAQs:

Q. Will I meet the Governor?

A. We are robotically exterminating, if not terminating, any possible excuse for him not showing up. We'll pull all our Kennedy strings if need be. (Carolyn, where are those pull-strings?)

Q. All things considered, wouldn't I rather be in San Francisco?

A. We figured as much. Check sej.org beginning in June for details on leading your own dinner or joining shindigs organized by others, be it carpooling 34 miles for Rice-a-Roni in The City or strolling to tony downtown Palo Alto.

Q. If I go to San Francisco, do I risk leaving my heart there?

A. Tony Bennett aside, the odds of that happening are about as good as a warm San Francisco night – global warming aside. With all we have planned for you – “Nuances of Nanotechnology Revisited,” to name just one sure-to-sellout panel – you'll no doubt save your heart for high-tech Stanford over enchanting San Francisco.

Q. Seriously?

A. Seriously, if the sea otters on the Monterey Bay tour don't grab you, the Santa Cruz redwoods will. And if you're itching to take home a convention bag full of story ideas, you may opt for a day in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, where more environmental issues converge than you can shake an oar

at. (If you'd rather wield a paddle, consider our Kayaking a Coastal Estuary tour.)

Q. Is it worth my money to stay all five days?

A. Yes, especially if you're getting reimbursed. Seriously, folks, there's no wind up or wind down at this conference. The adventure begins right at the start Wednesday evening with a mixer among top media executives, scientists and Silicon Valley moguls, followed by an SEJ-organized public forum with visionaries and luminaries sharing their views on how to accelerate commercialization of clean, secure and efficient energy. The conference ends on a crescendo Sunday morning at Stanford's Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve, where you'll learn more than you could imagine about climate change and the ecological history of the American West – all from a single patch of oak woodland.

Q. Do I need to pre-register for anything?

A. Hello? Do you wanna have fun? Advance registration is required for all Thursday tours, not to mention our hearty breakfast plenary Saturday where you'll be served reporter tools a la satellite.

Q. Must I go back home Sunday and face the daily deadline grind?

A. Yes, if you work for a living. But if you want to do some real living on the job, you'll extend your learning adventure three more days – to Wed., Sept. 12 – by boarding the SEJ high-altitude bus for a post-conference tour at Lake Tahoe, elevation 6,225 feet (1897 m) above sea level. Don't book your return flights until we email you the airport drop-off times.

Q. Will I lose my job by riding this SEJ adventure all eight days?

A. Probably not. And if you don't expense the river rafting at Tahoe, you might even keep your job. And remember, visit www.sej.org often for updates.

Chris Bowman, a veteran environmental reporter at The Sacramento Bee, makes guest appearances in the newsroom these days while working overtime on SEJ's 17th Annual Conference.

Biz... (from page 4)

als, really good journalists. All the things they were worried about, I worry about too.”

Why did he make the change? He says his own interest in learning new communication skills, combined with the usual newsroom woes (buyouts, shrinking newsroom staffs, and “all sorts of talk”), prompted him to explore the notion of working with local broadcasting interests.

With a focus on nine different content areas – astronomy, biology, chemistry, engineering, environment, geology, health, physics and weather – KQED, one of the flagship PBS affiliates, says its new multimedia effort is “our most ambitious local endeavor to date, utilizing all of our media platforms, educational resources and extraordinary partnerships.” The station is archiving and making available for free downloading all the Quest TV and radio broadcasts (www.kqed.org/quest).

“I wanted to keep being a newspaper reporter,” Rogers said

in a phone interview. “But with all the different types of media converging together,” he sees his KQED/*Mercury News* positions as “an extension of where all the media are going anyway.” With public broadcasting outlets generally available across the U.S., he encourages other print reporters to also explore partnerships with local broadcasting interests.

The KQED “Quest” initiative bears close watching, both for what it says about the changing nature of the journalism business and also for what it says about how one leading environmental reporter is dealing with those changes.

Bud Ward is an SEJ cofounder and honorary member. This column marks his first in a regular column in the SEJournal, exploring the full range of environmental journalism issues with special attention to the twists and turns toward a new journalism future.



SEJ challenge grant update: \$64,000 needed by May 31

SEJ's board, members and staff have raised nearly \$40,000 since June toward our \$103,000 Endowment Challenge. That's good progress, but there's an even bigger mountain to climb in order to meet the challenge by May 31.

The challenge was issued last summer by the Challenge Fund for Journalism (CFJ), a collaboration of the Ford Foundation, the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. If SEJ meets the challenge through new or increased individual donations to its 21st Century Fund (www.sej.org/about/index7.htm) endowment by the May 31 deadline, CFJ will give us a 50-percent match, or \$51,500.

Raising \$40,000 took ten months. Peter Thomson, SEJ's endowment committee chair, notes: "We're roughly three quarters of the way through the challenge year and have raised only roughly one third of what we need to meet our goal. That means there's a lot more heavy lifting ahead in the next few weeks, on all of our parts."

SEJ's board has donated roughly half of the money already in. The board is committed to raising at least \$1,500 each for a total of \$24,000. As of March 12, five have matched or exceeded that amount and almost all have exceeded donations from previous years. Total board donations as of March 17 are \$20,978.50.

SEJ staff has given more than \$2,700 toward the challenge.

Of SEJ's 1271 members, 153 – 12 percent – have donated more than \$8,000 toward the challenge fund. "This seems to be one area where we're falling short" said SEJ's associate director, Chris Rigel, who pointed out that if each of the 1118 members who have not yet donated gave \$60, the \$103,000 challenge would be met. Donors can set up a \$5-per-month plan that is very painless – less than 17 cents a day.

Board members are contacting individuals outside the membership, asking for donations from former conference speakers, founding and former board members and others who would want to see SEJ's future secured. Staff utilizes www.sej.org to solicit gifts from individuals visiting the site. Members will notice email messages with increasing frequency and urgency as the May 31 deadline approaches.

SEJ accepts donations for the 21st Century Endowment Fund from individuals only. No amount is too small, but if you are able to consider a donation of \$5,000 or more, please contact committee co-chairs Thomson at pthomson@sej.org/(617) 983-2327 or Carolyn Whetzel at cwhetzel@sej.org or (909) 793-1430.

To donate, visit www.sej.org or contact the SEJ office at sej@sej.org/(215) 884-8174.

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How many times did he say “global climate change”?

By DAVID POULSON

When Darren Samuelsohn heard “global climate change” during January’s State of the Union address, he suspected it was the first time the president had uttered the phrase in his annual assessment of the country.

The Greenwire senior reporter verified his hunch by combing through the six others. And his story was the first to lead with that fact.

“This was a big deal,” Samuelsohn said. “While Bush may not have made any major policy reversals on mandatory caps, it put him on record on national TV and before the new Democratic Congress as saying this is a priority for his administration.”

It took Samuelsohn about 30 minutes to cut and paste the texts of the past speeches into a Word document and scan them to make sure he was right. But there are easier ways for reporters on deadline to count the incidence of words in the State of the Union or in speeches given by your state environmental department chief, the leader of an environmental group, the mayor, school superintendent, police chief, governor.

It’s an analysis that may help you read the tea leaves for shifts in policy or priorities. At a minimum, it provides a fun entry point and fodder for a graphic to spice up a dull speech story.

First, check out <http://style.org/stateoftheunion/parse/>. It’s a nifty parsing tool for counting words in the State of the Union. The comparison of each of Bush’s speeches shows an evolution of subjects that are emphasized. Check out words like terror, terrorism, Iraq and war.

You can do the same thing with environment-related words and phrases - energy, ethanol, pollution, nuclear power, global warming. Or contrast words like war and peace or drugs and education.

Most reporters have greater need for analyzing local speeches. Here are two techniques for doing this quickly. One involves a simple spreadsheet. The other uses a speedier Internet-based tool, but you don’t get the satisfaction – and the security – of doing it yourself.

The spreadsheet technique:

Paste the text into Microsoft Word. Go to “edit/clear/formats” to get rid of formatting.

Call up the search and replace function (control f on PCs; open-apple f on Macs) and replace each punctuation mark with nothing by leaving the “Replace With” box empty.

Replace spaces (hit the spacebar once) with paragraph marks (^p). That puts each word on a separate line.

Paste into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet under a column labeled Words.

Run a pivot table to count the words. Sort by descending order. Here’s how:

Highlight the column including the header and go to Data/PivotTable and PivotChart Report.

Click the “next” button in the first wizard window. Click “next” in the next dialogue box. Click the “layout” button.

Drag the “words” button into the row area of the chart. Again drag the “words” button but this time drop it into the data area. It will change to “count of words.”

Click OK and finish. To put the word incidence in order, double click on the gray box behind the word column header. Click on advanced. Under “AutoSort options,” check descending. Under “Using field,” click on the drop-down arrow to sort by “count of words.” Click OK and OK again. The most frequent words appear at the top.

Ignore words like the, and, or, it, they, he, she and others that are not so interesting.

For an automated process, go to www.georgetown.edu/faculty/ballc/webtools/web_freqs.html. Paste text into this tool developed by Georgetown University and it will arrange word incidence alphabetically or by frequency.

If you just want the incidence of a particular phrase, you can always search for it in Word and replace it with something else. A dialogue box tells often the substitution was made.

There is a legitimate argument over whether how often something is mentioned represents the priorities of the speaker. It might be an objective measure. But you’ll need your reporter’s brain to provide context.

Word counts lend themselves well to graphics. *The New York Times* used circles of varying size and divided them into categories – domestic affairs, taxes and the economy, terrorism and foreign affairs – to depict word frequency in the 2007 State of the Union. In 2004, the *Times* used similar circles to depict the incidence of 20,000 words spoken by politicians at both party conventions.

“It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to look at one of these circle charts and figure out what a politician’s priorities are by the words they use,” said Karl Gude, the former information graphics editor at *Newsweek* who now teaches at Michigan State University. “And that’s just what I love about them. They convert a daunting amount of data into a simple and instant read.”

If nothing else, counting words is a lot more interesting than the old staple of counting how often a speech is interrupted by applause.

David Poulson teaches environmental journalism and computer-assisted reporting at Michigan State University’s Knight Center for Environmental Journalism.

Find FOIA tips at SEJ.org

Science content up; readers expect local media to be watchdogs

By JAN KNIGHT

New York Times' science section grows smaller while content increases, trend study shows

Although *The New York Times*' Science Times section grew smaller in 2000, editorial content increased while advertising decreased, according to a random sample analysis spanning 20 years.

University of Washington researchers found that editorial content in national editions of the *Times*' science section grew from an average of 1.7 pages in 1980 to an average of 5.4 pages in 2000. Meanwhile, advertising content grew from 0.3 pages in 1980 to five or six pages during the 1980s and 1990s, and then decreased to an average of two pages per issue in 2000.

The size of the section, including editorial content and ads, increased from an average of two pages in 1980 to about nine pages in the 1990s, but decreased to an average of about seven pages in 2000.

The researchers also found that Science Times' editorial coverage reflected a broad definition of science throughout the time period studied, with the section covering topics ranging from health to archeology.

Topics receiving the most coverage shifted over time, with articles about health, medicine and behavior accounting for nearly half (48 percent) of the section's coverage in 1980 and more than half (58 percent) in 2000. Technology and engineering received the most coverage in 1985, while the physical, Earth and life sciences received the most coverage in 1990 and 1995. Within the latter category, life sciences dominated coverage each year except 1985, and most life sciences coverage focused on wildlife biology or conservation, according to the study.

The researchers examined the Science Times because studies show that it influences science coverage in other news publications and broadcasts. Further, research shows that the mass media in general provide an important source of information not only for nonscientists, but also for scientists, who turn to the mainstream press to keep up with developments in fields other than their own.

The researchers randomly selected one issue per month of the Science Times national edition for 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000 and analyzed a total of 985 articles.

For more information, see Fiona Clark and Deborah L. Illman, "A Longitudinal Study of the New York Times Science Times Section" in *Science Communication*, Volume 27, Number 4 (June 2006), pp. 496 – 513.

People who watch, read the most environmental news also feel more at risk, survey shows

People who read or watch the most environment news view themselves as more knowledgeable about environmental issues and more at risk, according to a recent study.

The study presents findings from a telephone survey conducted among residents of the Ohio River valley "chemical corridor," referring to 12 poor Appalachian counties in southeastern Ohio and western West Virginia that are home to heavily polluting industries. The survey aimed to determine how people living in such areas view news coverage of environmental problems.

Respondents who viewed themselves as knowledgeable about environmental issues and considered such issues important reported reading or watching more environmental news than did those who viewed themselves as less environmentally aware and environmental knowledge as unimportant.

Further, those who more often read or watched environmental news also rated their own environmental risk significantly higher than those who reported seldom or never paying attention to environmental news, according to the study. However, the researcher did not conclude that more news use causes people to feel more at risk. Rather, he stated, "Whether risk perception is fueled by media coverage or provides a motive for viewing or reading such coverage" is unknown.

About 75 percent of the respondents rated television as very or somewhat good providers of environmental news, while 68 percent rated newspapers this way. The researcher suggested that this finding was especially important for local newspapers because "it is the local newspaper that, for many of these respondents, can address their own local problems."

But more than half of the respondents stated that their media seldom or never report on environmental problems. Yet, at the same time, 72 percent of those polled said that their local newspaper would be very or somewhat likely to report on environmental problems linked to local businesses. This counters previous research suggesting that local media might take a "lapdog," versus watchdog, role and avoid running such reports because the businesses hold local economic clout, including providing jobs.

The survey response rate was 35 percent – 453 surveys were completed out of 1,260 calls to working, non-business telephone numbers – for a sampling error of plus or minus 4.6 at the 95 percent confidence level.

For more information, see Dan Riffe, "Frequent Media Users See High Environmental Risks" in *Newspaper Research Journal*, Volume 27, Number 1 (Winter 2006), pp. 48 – 57.

**If every member gave \$60,
SEJ would meet the challenge
www.sej.org**

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.

The moving images of video inspire people to read

By KEN WEISS

It was a perfectly planned reporting trip to Florida. Or so I thought. A red tide of algae was sending toxic fumes ashore, causing coastal residents to cough and wheeze. Dead fish were choking the harbors and washing ashore. Bloating carcasses of turtles littered the beach. *Los Angeles Times* photographer Rick Loomis – who is trained to shoot video – was supposed to join me to record it all. As my cross-country flight landed in Tampa, I learned Loomis had been rerouted to Houston to await Hurricane Rita as it made landfall. He wouldn't be coming.

So there I was in Florida, carrying a video camera, a hefty tripod, assorted battery packs, wireless microphones and a fistful of blank videotapes. As soon as I reached my destination late that evening, I was met by residents ready to go public with their frustrations about red tide.

"Hold on," I told one of them as I unzipped a bag and pulled out the video camera. I hadn't really looked closely at the camera before, or its confusing assortment of knobs, dials and switches. I called our video guru's cell phone and reached him at home. "What can I do for you, Ken?" the groggy voice asked.

"How do you turn this damn thing on?"

Like it or not, video cameras are fast becoming part of the daily lives of print reporters. Smart newspapers realize that if they are going to attract and hold viewers on the World Wide Web, they need to do more than just post articles from the news pages. Mini-documentaries or even video snippets add something extra that can help lure a different type of audience to the newspaper's website. It worked with the *Los Angeles Times*' recent series called "Altered Oceans" (www.latimes.com/oceans). We put together 10 short videos, generally two to three minutes apiece, that generated a great deal of interest in the stories themselves. That's the kind of video project that this print reporter can get behind: Videos that inspire people to read.

After completing five video projects that accompanied various stories, I'm beginning to appreciate the power of the moving image. So much of what we write about the environment gets challenged by interest groups, industry lobbyists, government apologists or self-styled contrarians. I find it reassuring to collect videotape as backup. It's hard to refute video images of a gushing sewer pipe or industrial spill just as it is, say, to dismiss video images of L.A. police officers beating Rodney King.

Covering the environment is a natural subject for interesting video. Many of our topics offer great visuals: charismatic wildlife, interesting places or scenic habitat, and, all too often, disturbing pollutants or a cascade of environmental changes at the hand of our industrial society. Video can help us take readers and viewers along with us to be eyewitnesses to nature, both its thrills and its threats.

Videotapes are better than voice-only tapes for resurrecting material from an assignment that somehow eluded my notebook. How would I describe his facial hair or the color of his eyes?

What were her exact words? What was written on that sign? All can be found on the videotape.

I often ask the photographer to do a slow, 360-degree spin with the camera, so I can later rely on the videotape to help me describe the surroundings. Of course, I need to have the luxury of time to review the tapes, something

that often isn't possible under the crush of deadline. Video projects are much more manageable with non-deadline features and other long-term projects.

At the *Los Angeles Times*, some photographers are cross-trained to shoot video as well as still photographs. They are also instructed that their first priority is to get the best photographs possible for the newspaper. So during the reporting for the Altered Oceans series, Loomis often handed me the video camera as he started snapping pictures. This usually happened when he couldn't rest the camera on the ground. Now, I see myself as a reporter and writer. He sees me as his camera caddy. So all too often I would find myself with a notebook in one hand and a video camera in the other. I quickly learned I couldn't take notes with one hand. So I did the next best thing: I'd pull the trigger and start videotaping.

Loomis has developed a terrific eye as a photographer. I learned to piggyback on his talent. When he starts snapping pictures from a certain angle, I come up behind him and place the video camera just over his shoulder to get the same shot. It works brilliantly, except when he's using a flash.

Operating a video camera is relatively easy. Today's video cameras have automatic settings that adjust the focus and for different levels of lighting. I put it on automatic, press the trigger and go. I learned to avoid zooming in or out. Nor do I do much panning. The best shots are often ones during which the camera is stationary.

Gathering high-quality sound is much more difficult. Batteries seem to fail at the worst possible time, as do the connections between the camera and wireless lavalier microphones. Those are the small ones you pin to the lapel of someone being interviewed. Sound is tricky stuff.

It can be arduous to boil down hours and hours of videotape into just a few minutes. Writing a script for the video and then voicing the narration reminds me of the value of clean, simple writing. Short sentences and simple words sound better to the ear.

I never would have expected it, but working with video has helped me improve my writing.

Ken Weiss is an environmental writer for the Los Angeles Times, focusing on coast and oceans.



Investigating water: So what happens when water turns black?

By RON SEELY

Water, of all the natural resources upon which we rely, is perhaps the one that we take most for granted. We turn on our faucets and out it comes, clear and cool and always there.

But when something goes wrong, when we turn the tap and the water comes out discolored, we are instantly connected to this

In Madison, Wis., three years ago, many residents started noticing unsettling problems with their water. In some homes the water from faucets ran nearly black. Strange black chunks settled to the bottoms of water glasses and could be seen frozen into ice cube trays. Toilets and showers became clogged with the gunk. Suddenly, water in Madison was no longer something to take for granted.

most necessary substance in a way that is elemental and eye-opening. So it was in Madison, Wis., three years ago when many residents started noticing unsettling problems with their water. In some homes the water from faucets ran nearly black. Strange black chunks settled to the bottoms of water glasses and could be seen frozen into ice cube trays. Toilets and showers became clogged with the gunk.

Suddenly, water in Madison was no longer something to take for granted. People wanted to know, first of all, what was in their water. Was it safe? Where did the water come from anyway? And who was in charge of making sure that the water got to our homes clean and drinkable?

As the *Wisconsin State Journal's* science and environmental reporter, I pursued the answers, finding much about the little-known but vitally important inner workings of the public utility charged with providing and caring for Madison's drinking water.

The picture that emerged was disturbing. A story that started with residents complaining about discolored water flowing from their faucets would eventually turn into a four-part series called "Water Worries" that found numerous contaminants, including viruses, in the deep aquifer from which the city draws its drinking water. My investigation revealed an aging and decrepit water system that increased the perils of contamination, a renegade public utility that received little or no oversight from the city, and managers who were less than forthright about everything from carcinogens and bacteria in the water to the security of wells and water towers.

Madison seemed an unlikely place for such a story to surface. The city has long been known for its progressive politics and its environmental awareness. It regularly makes top ten lists of the best places in the country to live, for everything from schools to bike trails to the lakes that shine from just about any vantage point.

That reputation is largely deserved. I've lived in the city

for 30 years and know well that Madison is a beautiful place to live and work and raise a family. And water defines the landscape, from the chain of lakes on which the city is built to the trout streams that beckon anglers just a ten-minute drive from downtown.

So it was a shock when, after just a couple weeks of nosing around the Madison Water Utility and the management of the city's drinking water supply, I started turning up information that seemed very much at odds with the community's squeaky clean resume.

I had plenty to report. But, in addition to revealing the results of my digging, I also wanted to explain to Madison residents where their drinking water comes from, how it gets to their homes, and how the utility that manages

the water operates. Such a foundation seemed necessary if readers were to fully understand our findings. So the series turned into a blend of investigative and explanatory reporting complete with graphics and interactive maps and charts that brought to life the workings of a public utility that operates, like most utilities, with little or no attention from the public. Though they are in reality rich repositories of stories, such utilities are about as visible as the buried water pipes they oversee.

Until the spring of 2005, in fact, the Madison Water Utility operated in near obscurity. But then, residents from one of the city's neighborhoods started complaining about the dirty water coming from their taps. The discolored water, it turned out, was from the mineral manganese, a naturally occurring metal that can cause health problems if ingested in large enough amounts over a long period of time. Especially at risk are babies and people with liver problems.

Initially, I was assigned to do a story about manganese and about what the city's water utility was doing to combat the problem. What I discovered in that first story set off alarm bells. Even though it was turning up water nearly blackened by manganese and even though dozens of residents were finding black chunks of the mineral in their water, the Madison Water Utility was doing little at that early stage to alert its customers to the potential dangers of manganese. Instead, callers to the utility were being told there was no danger and that even if tap water was cloudy, it was alright to use.

I spent some time at the water utility's offices, talking to engineers and looking at maps. When I asked one engineer to explain the city's system of pumps and wells and how water reached homes, he insisted that the system with its pressure zones and 24 wells was too complicated to easily explain. I insisted that he try to help me understand. Over two or three sessions I developed a thorough understanding of what neighborhoods were

(Continued next page)

served by what wells, how water pumped from the deep aquifer flowed through the city, and how the water was stored, treated and tested for contaminants.

But those early interviews only piqued my interest. After doing a December 2005 story about the utility's response to manganese, I proposed a project in which we would take a hard look at the city's drinking water and how it was being managed. I started filing open record requests, seeking water testing data for the previous five years for all 24 of the city's wells and all the records regarding public water quality complaints for the previous three years.

During my conversations with the utility's chief engineer, I heard him refer several times to an infrastructure study which had been completed the year before for the utility by a national consultant. The study had never been released publicly so I obtained a copy of that and spent several days studying the fat report.

After the first story on manganese, I started hearing from residents, dozens and dozens of them. Young parents called to tell me they worried about their children drinking the water, had stopped using tap water completely and used bottled water instead. Others called with stories about how poorly they had been treated by the water utility. And yet other calls came from workers within the water utility who wanted to provide me information about long-standing problems within the agency. One especially important source was a resident who first brought the manganese problem to the city's attention and ended up taking on the utility practically single handed.

All told, I spent nearly five months sorting through all of this material, interviewing sources, and traipsing around the city with flushing crews and engineers, learning about water and pipes and wells. I sat at many kitchen tables listening to residents talk about their frustrations with their water and the utility, including one elderly woman who showed me her laundry, turned brown by the water, and said, angrily, "If I wanted tan underclothes, I'd buy them that way!"

I spent hours interviewing the water quality specialist with the state Department of Natural Resources who was responsible for regulation of the Madison Water Utility and who also had a computer full of test and other data that proved invaluable because it allowed me to check utility data against data gathered by the regulatory agency.

This is what I found:

- Although contaminants rarely reach levels beyond health standards, the aquifer is contaminated by numerous pollutants, many of them carcinogens. In four wells, manganese was above the health standards recommended by the EPA. In one well, which serves a major city high school, the levels of the industrial carcinogen, carbon tetrachloride, exceeded the EPA health standard in 2000. I found a study that had even identified viruses in the city's wells, something few people knew about. Using spread sheets, I analyzed five years' worth of test data for five contaminants, including three industrial carcinogens as well as manganese and iron, for all 24 of the city's wells.

Using this data, along with information from the utility engineers about which wells serve which neighborhoods, our graphic artist created an interactive map and a chart that allowed readers to click on the well closest to their home and read in a pop-up screen what levels of the selected contaminants were found in their well. It was the first time many readers, we learned, were

able to identify the well that serves their home, let alone find out what was in the water.

- The unreleased infrastructure report proved a gold mine of information. We found that the utility's own consultant had warned the utility was neglecting to spend enough on replacement of aging pipes and wells and other infrastructure – a problem that plagues utilities across the country. In Madison, those aging pipes, some dating to the late 1800s, were in fact partly responsible for the manganese, which was building up inside the old pipes.

The utility, according to its own consultants, was spending only about \$200,000 a year on replacing facilities such as wells when it should have been spending closer to \$2.5 million. And it was spending \$2.8 million on pipe replacement when it should have been shelling out closer to \$6.5 million.

- Based on documents obtained through open records requests, interviews with sources inside the utility and with state regulators, we were able to confirm that utility officials had failed to track water quality complaints for two years (a violation of state law), had quarreled with the Department of Natural Resources about issuing a boil order because of bacteria showing up in well tests, had not reported a break-in at a water tower, and failed to report levels of carbon tetrachloride that exceeded federal health standards in one city well. Asked about that failure, utility officials blamed a typo in the water quality report in which the test result was supposed to appear.

Within three weeks after the series appeared, Madison Mayor David Cieslewicz announced a ten-point plan to protect the city's drinking water. The plan set performance standards for the utility's general manager and directed more spending on replacing pipes and wells.

The story continues to unfold. The water utility, for example, has announced plans to shut down two of the problem wells identified in the series. As part of his efforts to restore confidence in the water utility, the mayor ordered that consultant be hired to study the utility's operation. In a recently released report, the consultant pointed out many of the very findings that turned up in the newspaper's investigation – poor communication, flawed management, and a lack of willingness to be forthright about problems with the public water supply.

In the months after the stories appeared, residents themselves started to organize and to lobby the utility for more information and for more public involvement in decisions about everything from wells to testing.

Compared to the years prior to the *State Journal's* reporting on the utility, residents in Madison have become very aware of not only where their drinking water comes from but how it is managed. Hundreds have turned up for neighborhood meetings on the city's water problems and city officials, in the midst of an election season, are peppered with questions about water.

Those officials, from the mayor on down, know the city's residents – and the *State Journal* – are going to pay much closer attention to how this most precious of natural resources is cared for.

Ron Seely continues to cover water and other science and environment issues at the State Journal.

Global warming at freezing Sundance '07

By JOANN M. VALENTI

Without a doubt, *Everything's Cool*, a documentary on climate change, most aptly defined the 25th Annual Sundance Film

With last year's surprise success "An Inconvenient Truth" bringing Al Gore to the Academy Awards with a nomination for best documentary, "Everything's Cool" follows with a touch of humor to

naïl the fossil-fuel industry for their PR campaign to suggest scientists are still debating global warming. The film features familiar sources – Bill McKibben, Ross Gelbspan (formerly of *The Boston Globe*), The Weather Channel's Heidi Cullen, whistleblower Rick Piltz and others – to consider what it will take to move the United States from laggard nation to world leader on global warming.

It really is a shame there remains no award specifically for quality in filmmaking focused on an environmental theme, documentary or drama. The Sundance press office hands out lists of films by genre and interest area. None includes "environment." The closest is "nature, science and sports." Go figure that one.

For the fifth year The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation presented a \$20,000 cash award to a film for the quality of its thematic presentation of science and technology. "Dark Matter," starring an impressive newcomer from China, Liu Ye, Aidan Quinn and multiple award-winning actress Meryl Streep, was selected from

(Continued next page)

Courtesy of SUNDANCE



The "tower of progress" from Robert Redford's film "The Unforeseen."

Festival goers' experience in Utah's below freezing January weather. Record-setting temperatures dropped into negative double digits, an especially challenging experience for the usual hoards of film industry representatives and celebrities from Los Angeles.

entation of science and technology. "Dark Matter," starring an impressive newcomer from China, Liu Ye, Aidan Quinn and multiple award-winning actress Meryl Streep, was selected from

I heard something on the radio last week about this global warming thing. Somebody said it's from human activity, and I read someplace else that it's just natural, and I don't know WHAT to think!

THEN I heard about SEJ, whose members work to cover environmental issues more accurately, with higher-quality reporting, and try to get more stories about environmental issues out to me, Joe Public. **I also heard that SEJ needs HELP!** Now, I'm already not real clear about what's going on with global warming—or why gasoline costs so much and whether it'll run out, or if my tap water has lead in it, or what kind of car I should get to lower my contribution to ozone pollution. And frankly, I'd like to understand this stuff better. So I'm asking ya...

...please donate to SEJ...

I figured out that **if every member gave \$60 (or \$5 a month)**, it would bring in **\$67,080** — just enough to qualify for the challenge grant. Maybe you can't give that much — maybe you can give more. And individuals who aren't members can give too, so ask yer mum.

You can **download a pledge form or donate online at www.sej.org**. Or just send a check with a note that it's a donation. (It's tax deductible.)

I'm giving online...my checks are all soggy.



among the 123 feature films representing 25 countries. The film's storyline, ripped from real news reports, shows the dark side of science and academe, especially for international graduate students. Only three screenings seemed to meet the Sloan Award criteria, and they will likely be hard to find ("Bugmaster" from Japan and "Expired," a U.S. product with Terri Garr in a strong supporting role). Sloan does not consider documentaries, although the award was given one year to "Grizzly Man."

Had documentary films been included, the roster may have swelled, although the emphasis often leaned more toward environmental advocacy than underlying science/technology issues. Canadian/Ukrainian photographer Edward Burtynsky, whose work is featured in the documentary "Manufactured Landscapes," claims his is a neutral stance. His images do manage to make mountains of e-waste in China and ship-breaking in Bangladesh somehow beautiful. At a time when the Bush

Administration has chased the Toxics Release Inventory into hiding, Burtynsky focuses on industry's transformation of nature. Recycling yards, mine tailings, quarries, refineries and resource assaults replace natural beauty in what filmmaker Jennifer Baichwal depicts as the dilemma of modern society.

Other environmental- or science-inspired possible sleeper-hits include: "Manda Bala" ("Send a Bullet") from Brazil, winner of the Grand Jury documentary prize and a cinematography award, exposing corruption in Brazil (there's a frog farm involved); "In the Shadow of the Moon," World Cinema Documentary prize winner retelling the Apollo landings story from a British filmmaker's point of view; two documentaries on historical nuclear issues ("White Light/Black Rain" from HBO and "Wonders Are Many" about the making of the opera "Dr. Atomic"); and "The Unforeseen," a documentary on development in Austin from the Sundance Channel, featuring festival founder, actor/director Robert Redford, who is also the film's executive producer.

"How do young people get a grip without the truth of documentaries?" Redford asked at the opening press conference. Sundance films often stress activism and this year seemed to indicate a new maturity in themes. Redford said he was "taken with how entertaining a sharp edged truth can be." Myriad social issues spiraled through the majority of Sundance films this year. Human rights, politics and environmentalism deep-sixed the usual Hollywood fare of glamour, romance and fantasy. The festival opened with a call to action in a documentary using animation and archival footage to reenact the trial of the Chicago 10. An anti-war theme was also evident in the audience award winner "Grace Is Gone." The film, starring John Cusack in a story about a military fatality in Iraq, sold for \$4 million. Sloan Award Director Doren

Weber, who hailed "Dark Matter" for showing that science is not all about heroes, some "go off the rails," called film "a delivery system for ideas."

It is encouraging to these emerging filmmakers when last year's Sundance hit "Little Miss Sunshine," made for a mere \$8



Courtesy of SUNDANCE

Robert Redford's documentary on development in Austin, Texas, featured this scene from nearby Barton Springs.

million, gets sold to Fox Searchlight for a record \$10.5 million, then grosses \$83 million worldwide and goes on to be nominated for an Oscar. The film is now available on DVD. The medium does indeed sell the message if not at least raise awareness. An editorial in the local *Park Record* called Sundance 2007 "a crash course in global citizenship." Along with the Sundance crowd, more celebrities do seem to be rising to the consciousness and understanding occasion. Popular music group Green Day recently signed on with Natural Resources Defense Council to create Move America Beyond Oil (www.greendaynrdc.com) to "encourage people to become educated on environmental issues." The collaboration was announced in the Dec. 28-Jan. 11 issue of *Rolling Stone Magazine*. Redford sits on NRDC's board.

This year's jurors for the science award were: Darren Aronofsky, an award-winning writer/director whose films include "Supermarket Sweep" (his senior thesis film), "PI," "Requiem for a Dream" and "The Fountain;" Ann Druyan, co-author of the "Cosmos" television series, co-creator of CONTACT, and creative director of NASA's Voyager interstellar message system; Brian Greene, Columbia University Professor of Physics/Mathematics and author of "The Elegant Universe" and "The Fabric of the Cosmos;" Howard Suber from UCLA's School of Theater, Film & Television and author of "The Power of Film;" and John Underkoffler, science consultant from "Minority Report," "The Hulk" and other productions.

See www.sundance.org for more information on the festival and specific films.

JoAnn M. Valenti, SEJournal Editorial Board member and emerita professor, has attended Sundance since 1992.

Nukes... (from page 1)

Eventually, several years of neglected or overlooked maintenance put northern Ohio on the brink of an accident had operators scrambling to keep massive amounts of radioactive steam from escaping and the plant's core from melting.

The story didn't end with the record \$33.5 million in fines imposed on FirstEnergy, with \$28 million of that coming in

Given how emotional and complex nuclear power remains – even more than 50 years after it began with former President Dwight Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace speech – street cred is absolutely essential.

So let's get down to some of the basics:

Study the websites.

- **The Nuclear Regulatory Commission** (www.nrc.gov) is the federal regulator. Its site has oodles of fact sheets on subjects from reactor operation to waste disposal. You can retrieve transcripts of speeches and find out about anything from upcoming enforcement hearings to public meetings about nuclear topics that may affect your plant or the industry at large.

You'll want to familiarize yourself with the NRC's Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS), the agency's primary database for public documents. Agency officials themselves admit it can be a little clunky, although it's gotten better. Don't be afraid to call your regional NRC public affairs officer or the agency's headquarters to walk you through it.

- **The Nuclear Energy Institute** (www.nei.org) is the industry's Washington-based lobbyist. Its site has a wealth of information from the pro-industry point of view and has people on call 24 hours a day. Yes, you have to tread carefully with the NEI's spin but – in fairness – the same goes for those from the activist community, as well as academia and the government (in this case, that's particularly true: The NRC grew out of the old Atomic Energy Commission, which was heavily involved with promoting nuclear. And many NRC officials are former Navy officers who have been around nuclear for years, though maybe not in a civilian capacity).

- **The Union of Concerned Scientists** (www.ucsusa.org) is among the most-quoted watchdog groups nationally, in large part because its chief nuclear spokesman, David Lochbaum, grew up being trained as a safety engineer in the industry. Nobody knows the industry and the NRC politics associated with it as well as Lochbaum. He's so good that, well, even actor Paul Newman has been known to have him out at his place. The **Nuclear Information and Resource Service** (www.nirs.org) and **Greenpeace** (www.greenpeace.org/usa) also are among the tops in the nuclear watchdog community, meticulously watching what goes on inside the Beltway.

Take the time to read a few books.

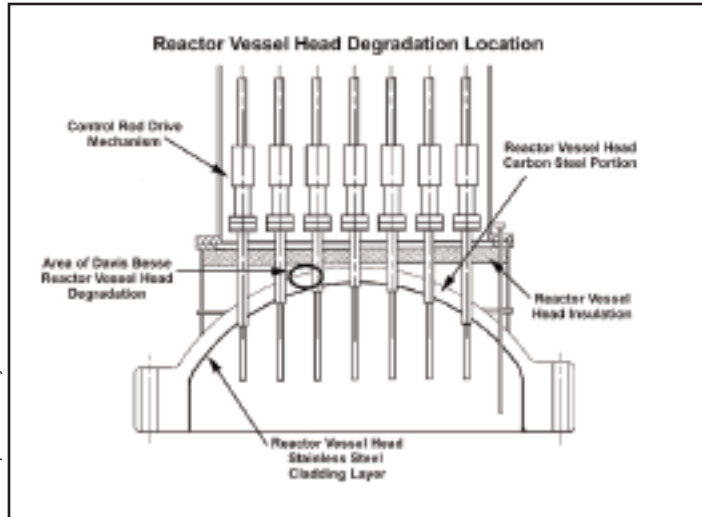
There are too many to list here. Many public libraries have the gamut ranging from technical engineering how-to documents to the fringe reactionary stuff. But one you should have on your desk at all times is this: The NRC Information Digest. It's always been a handy reference in a deadline pinch. But the good news is that the 2006-2007 edition (Volume 18, published last August) is the best. It's been expanded to include more visuals and other graphics and has more background about issues than its predecessors. You can flip to the back and find out, for example, the date your local plant went online, the date its 40-year license is due to expire, background on plants that may have been shut down or cancelled, etc.

Visit a plant.

This is not as easy to pull off as it was before the events of Sept. 11, 2001. At one point, a FirstEnergy official said I had vis-

(Continued next page)

Graphic courtesy of U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION



The above diagram shows where FirstEnergy Corp. allowed Davis-Besse's old reactor head to melt to roughly the width of a pencil eraser. The steel cap is supposed to be 6 inches thick to hold back massive pressure from the reactor.

January of 2006 when the utility – to avoid criminal prosecution – conceded it had lied to the government about the plant's dangerous condition in the fall of 2001. Three workers accused of lying to the government were indicted; the case has potential ramifications for whistleblowers because one in particular claims to have been set up after trying to get the utility to fix known problems.

Throughout much of that ordeal and even today, five years later, I have been aided in reporting the Davis-Besse story by a Deep Throat-like source inside the plant.

I won't, obviously, divulge who he or she is. Let's just say it's a person in a key position who has repeatedly tipped me off about things, documented and undocumented, even before the utility's public relations department or the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has learned of them. We've met each other in person. We have an understanding never to make eye contact or speak to each other in the hallway of a public meeting, even if it's just to exchange pleasantries or chit-chat about the weather. Plus, naturally, I have many other people feeding me information, from citizens to workers to activists to, yes, even industry folks. But nobody like this source.

I've admittedly taken the long way around in getting to the heart of this Covering Nuclear Power 101 story to make a fundamental point: Street cred.

Yes, there's no substitute for credibility on any beat. When it comes to nuclear power, though, you'll have scientists, academics, industry lobbyists, environmental activists, public officials and general know-it-all's trying to read between the lines of your copy for hints of an agenda or to catch you in a dumb mistake, like when a desk editor refers to the stuff coming out of cooling towers as steam instead of water vapor.

ited so often she thought I qualified to be a tour guide. But tours are still possible. It's a utility-by-utility call (the NRC can't make them let you in). And if you get in, don't make the mistake of thinking you're visiting all 103 plants just because you've visited one. That's one of the drawbacks of the current situation: There are veritably 103 different types of designs. Uniformity: Bad for baseball stadiums; good for nuclear plants. One of the goals of the new age of nuclear, should it come to pass, will be somewhat of a standardized "cookie-cutter" design so parts are more interchangeable and engineers can be cross-trained easier to go from plant to plant.

Besides the variances in designs, America has two distinct types of reactors: Pressurized water reactors and boiling water reactors. The former are more powerful and efficient, but operate at high temperatures and intensity. They're akin to pressure cookers and constitute about two-thirds of our fleet (69 of the 103 plants have pressurized reactors, while 34 have boiling water reactors). Look for the initials PWR or BWR to designate them. For some things, they're regulated differently.

Also, learn if you can go inside containment or not. You'll want to suit up and go inside to get the full experience, if you can. The only time utilities can allow this to happen is when the plants are down for refueling, a major event that happens about once every two years now (due to a higher grade of uranium) and typically lasts only a month to six weeks, at the most (time is money). Be flexible, call in advance and have a window of time available. Although the plant isn't operating when it's being refueled, it's the busiest time for the utility because it is trying to do literally hundreds of jobs it can't otherwise. Call in advance and get an overview of the work that's being done during the outage. Better yet, ask to sit in on one or two of the outage briefings.

Don't just wait to run things by public affairs officers or PR types.

Get to know the different types of engineers and what priorities exist. To wit: As part of my Davis-Besse research, I ended up sitting through several meetings in which metallurgists talked sometimes for up to 12 or 13 hours. Consequently, I learned that a metal alloy called Alloy 600 was used widely throughout the nuclear industry during its construction boom but is not nearly as corrosion-resistant as once thought. It is being replaced by a more robust alloy, called Alloy 690. That may sound like geeky inside baseball stuff for engineers, but it's going to be more of an issue in the future as parts undergo more stress and the issue of metal fatigue becomes more prevalent.

Get to conferences, public meetings and even classrooms whenever you can.

Go online and find the syllabus of a respected nuclear law, history or engineering professor.

Think of how to localize a national nuke story.

This will help get your feet wet and familiarize yourself with some issues, as well as make some contacts. Think there's nothing out there? Check out the proposed rail and shipping routes to Nevada's Yucca Mountain, the potential resting place someday for all of the nation's spent fuel from reactor cores (it's the only thing in civilian hands classified as high-level radioactive waste).



Photo courtesy of NUCLEAR ENERGY INSTITUTE

Inside Nevada's Yucca Mountain, the only site being considered for long-term storage of spent fuel from U.S. commercial nuclear reactors.

The U.S. Department of Energy has published the likely routes. The Ohio Turnpike, for example, which is less than a mile from my house, may wind up with as much as 40 percent of that type of waste that is en route to Nevada. You wanna go low-level? Check on the status of the low-level waste dump being considered by the regional compact that includes your state. Those regional dumps, if ever built, will hold virtually anything radioactive beyond what was pulled from a reactor core, including waste from nuclear plants, hospitals and dental offices.

Become familiar with the following names (and others):

Babcock & Wilcox, General Electric, Framatome, Westinghouse, the Electric Power Research Institute, the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations. They are just some of the industry movers and shakers. There are seven plants with Babcock & Wilcox designs; all run hotter than the industry average and have design issues familiar to the NRC. INPO is the nuclear industry's chief consultant, a clearinghouse of information. While it refuses to talk to the press, you still need to know its influence.

Learn about Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, the Manhattan Project and other historical events of the nuclear age.

This will give you some context. Three Mile Island is especially important: It forged the modern era of emergency preparedness plans and even better communication: Believe it or not, there was only one telephone line into the control room when the event

(Continued next page)

Nukes... (from page 17)

was happening in March of 1979. Even then-President Jimmy Carter had trouble getting through. And although the quest to develop civilian nuclear power generation was different than the race to build an atomic bomb, there are parallels you need to understand.

Read a few GAO reports.

The agency changed its name from General Accounting Office to Government Accountability Office a few years ago, but

A vice president from a Southern utility ... told me there are many people in the industry who felt Davis-Besse's problems were so avoidable and damaging to his industry that they'd like to take a certain person from the plant "into a dark parking lot and beat the living %#\$%" out of him for what he had done to their industry's reputation.

it still has the same abbreviation and website, which is www.gao.gov. It's the investigative arm of Congress. Search by topic, whether it's security against terrorism (most sensitive material was removed from the public domain, as you might expect) or the status of Yucca Mountain. Get to know some of the key members of Congress. In the House, U.S. Rep. Ed Markey of Massachusetts is the biggest anti-nuke. In the Senate, Majority Leader Harry Reid has been fighting for years to keep Yucca Mountain from getting sacked with the spent nuclear fuel.

Talk to resident inspectors: The NRC's eyes and ears.

Each nuclear plant has two resident inspectors who walk the halls and report their findings to the NRC daily and in longer-term inspection reports (Davis-Besse, at the height of its recent problems, was the nation's only plant to have three). You can find out who they are and get the phone number to their office at the plant off the NRC's staff directory. If you're lucky enough to strike up a rapport with them, you're ahead of the game. But be forewarned they're a tough nut to crack. First, they'll be leery of being quoted. Second, they get moved around. The NRC, to keep them from getting too cozy with the company they're regulating, typically moves them from plant to plant every three years.

If you have two plants in one area, as I do, you may get to know some of the better resident inspectors because the NRC sometimes allows them to spend three years at one site and three years at another nearby, so they are around one area long enough to buy a house. Some wind up being hired by the utilities they've been inspecting; believe it or not, the NRC does not have a consistent policy requiring a break in service.

In any event, it's essential to learn how they operate. Resident inspectors have certain checks they do daily and others that are on a checklist for periods of every two weeks or more. They aren't expected to know everything about a plant's operation, but be there on the front line to find out about the big stuff and get a sense of issues affecting each particular workforce. These are extremely stressful, rigid inspector jobs.

Even with two per plant, it's hard to keep up with the work-

load. If your plant only has one inspector for an extended time, as Davis-Besse did for nine months before its 2002 problems were revealed, that could be a sign that the inspection workload has become overwhelming and should raise some red flags.

Understand why the nuclear industry has been in the doldrums.

It's not just the post-Three Mile Island regulations. Even the NRC will tell you that applications for new plant construction ceased months before Three Mile Island, due to continued cost overruns. In short, to paraphrase a Clinton-era mantra about the nation's economy: It's the economics [of building new plants], stupid! The agency, after years of robust efforts in Washington to streamline nuclear regulations and provide new incentives, now expects to see the first four or five

applications for new construction in almost 30 years this fall, with other applications likely to be submitted in 2008.

In closing, don't get psyched out by the pro-nuke/anti-nuke rhetoric. Yes, it's thick, annoying and enormous.

But the best sources from either side of the fence will recognize you for doing your job as a journalist: Holding people accountable. You'd be surprised, for example, just how much some people in the nuclear industry want their colleagues to be held accountable in the media.

In the Davis-Besse case, I swear I came across as many pro-nukes in other parts of the country upset about what needlessly happened as I did anti-nukes.

To wit: In a Washington ballroom at the NRC's annual conference in 2005, when I was filing a Davis-Besse story, I was approached by a vice president from a Southern utility who – much to my surprise – lauded me for my coverage. He told me there are many people in the industry who felt Davis-Besse's problems were so avoidable and damaging to his industry that they'd like to take a certain person from the plant "into a dark parking lot and beat the living %#\$%" out of him for what he had done to their industry's reputation.

The Nuclear Energy Institute's engineering director, Alex Marion, almost seemed to make a point of letting people know that Davis-Besse wasn't the standard operating procedure for all 103 nuclear plants.

Obviously, if he hadn't, that wouldn't have bided well for his industry.

Thelma Wiggins, one of the NEI's spokeswomen, once passed along that her institute respects me because I'm tough, yet fair. "We know you're going to ask the hard questions that need to be asked, but you'll be fair about it and will do your homework," she said.

So go at it. Do your nuclear research.

Play hard. But play fair.

Tom Henry writes for the Toledo Blade.

VoiceofSanDiego... (from page 1)

one aging power plant put out enough carbon monoxide ‘to sully the air in 12 Empire State Buildings.’

“When things get complicated, he warns readers that it isn’t as easy as it looks. One example: He poses the question of whether local residents should move to a less polluted ZIP code,” Poulson said.

“Here’s how he answers it: ‘Not necessarily. Calculating the effect of exposure is complicated, health experts and regulators say. Because a drop of one chemical can be more dangerous than a gallon of another. And the emissions diffuse and migrate on the wind.’”

Poulson said that “rather than write an impenetrable or superficial story, Rob acknowledges the inherent complexity of evaluating air pollution while assuring readers that he can explain it to them.”

“Then he does just that,” Poulson said.

SEJournal asked Davis to answer some questions about his Internet-only story. Some of his interesting advice to reporters: Treat your project like a Chia Pet.

Q: Explain what voiceofsandiego.org is. What are the pluses of such a platform and what are the minuses?

A: We’re a two-year-old nonprofit, online daily newspaper. San Diego used to be a three-newspaper town, and that had been cut to one by the time we launched in 2005. We first focused primarily on city government – what we saw as an under-covered subject in San Diego – and quickly branched out to include other traditional beats like real estate, crime and the environment. We’ve all gotten our start in traditional newsrooms, so the tools we use are the same. Our focus is almost exclusively on being watchdogs, holding our local officials accountable through in-depth reporting. So having the environment beat is perfect.

The advantages of the platform are limitless. I’m able to interact with readers more than I ever have before, both by using audio, video and other interactive features – and just because we encourage our readers to e-mail us with tips and story ideas. While I still miss having a paper product in my hands each day, I don’t miss the hold-your-breath circulation drives.

Q: I understand that a boot camp before last fall’s SEJ conference was a key element in getting this project done. Tell me about that and how it helped you.

A: I was fortunate enough to be accepted to Michigan State University’s first environmental reporting boot camp. We spent

three days poring over a range of topics from Excel management to climate change to *Massachusetts v. EPA*.

I got to talking with Dave Poulson, one of MSU’s instructors, over a beer one night about pollution story ideas. I went to the



Photo courtesy of VOICEOFSAN DIEGO.ORG

The Encina Power Station in Carlsbad, Calif., north of San Diego, was San Diego County’s largest source of federally regulated pollution in 2004.

conference wanting to know what air pollution stories the EPA’s Toxics Release Inventory could help unlock. Dave instead pointed me to a couple of California regulators that have air-pollution-specific databases. The seed was planted. As soon as I returned from Vermont, I sent in my records request for the database I ultimately relied on.

I have to note that SEJ members’ help extended beyond the boot camp and conference. As I slogged through my first major look at air pollution, some loyal list-servers provided sound advice and counsel. I’m not just saying this: The story was a testament to the rewards of being an SEJ member.

Q: How did the idea for the story begin? Where did the idea come from?

A: My editor and I wanted to uncover and profile the region’s most egregious air polluter. San Diego doesn’t have Los Angeles’ smog, but our air is hardly clear. It seemed like an obvious question that neither of us could answer: Who was the dirtiest polluter? The story’s other angles all branched out from there. For example: Was air pollution more likely to discriminate against the poor? (Yes.) Which ZIP code had the most toxic pollution? (Escondido, Calif.)

Q: How did you sell it to your editor?

A: He was on board from the inception, so I didn’t have to make a case. His role was in support, giving me the time I need-

(Continued next page)

Voice of San Diego... (from page 19)

ed to effectively learn about and engage the topic, including the week-long trip to Vermont. With a staff of five reporters, I'm grateful for being afforded the time to devote to projects like these – the stories that matter.

Q: What kind of sources of information did you use?

With my analysis in hand, I turned to public health experts to answer questions about whether residents should be concerned. Regulators were able to put the results in historical context. Environmental justice advocates pointed to the results as one of the fundamental reasons they exist. Energy experts helped put that sector's pollution in perspective. And the polluters themselves offered great insight about what some feel is an unfair pollution measurement system.

Q: Do you use an outline or some other mechanism to help you organize the material? If so, how flexible do you view it? How do you manage the information you found.

A: I managed just about everything either on a legal pad or in Excel. No tricks. I made different versions of the spreadsheet for different purposes – one to crunch toxic chemical pollution, one to crunch federally regulated pollutants and one keep my income vs. pollution calculations.

Q: What results surprised you? In the end did you find out something that was different from what you expected?

A: While we were able to pinpoint the top ZIP code for toxic pollution, nothing there betrayed even the slightest hint that it was any different than my own neighborhood. Same traffic, same businesses, same guys moseying down the street in cowboy hats. That underlined how ubiquitous business' toxic air pollution is: benzene from the gas station, perchloroethylene from your local dry cleaner. You don't see it, you don't know it's there, and yet it poses a health risk. And as serious as that risk may be, it pales in comparison to the cancer risk posed by diesel emissions. I didn't realize how small of a role businesses play in contributing to the ambient air's cancer risk.

Beyond that, the project drove home the reality of environmental justice. We found that ZIP codes where median household income is below \$30,000 produced five times more feder-

(Continued next page)

Photo courtesy of VOICEOFSDIEGO.ORG



This ZIP code – 92025, in Escondido, Calif. – was the largest source of toxic air pollution in San Diego County in 2004.

A: Once back from Vermont, I requested an Excel spreadsheet of 2004's air pollution from the San Diego Air Pollution Control District, our local air regulator. They gave it to me in the form I asked for, which was a big help. So that gave me my starting point – something easily sortable by business name, by ZIP code, by pounds of pollution, by chemical or criteria. That database and I got to know each other quite well. From that, I totaled pounds of pollution by ZIP; cross-checked that with median-household income stats and began making calls.

Future... (from page 5)

involved with video reports with no training suggests some editors think television reporting is easy. But broadcast journalists are quick to say it's more difficult than it looks. Done poorly, critics say, it threatens the integrity of the newspaper brand.

Many newspaper reporters who have dabbled in television news will tell you how surprisingly difficult it is to condense a story down to two minutes or less, to find that perfect marriage of the spoken word and video, and to do it all on deadlines worse than print.

"It's very different," said Weiss. Doing television-style news reporting "has given me greater appreciation for my colleagues in TV news. Stand-ups are hard work. Learning to narrate video is tough to do well. Getting good sound is difficult."

Broadcast journalists point out that a video news report for the web simply cannot be the first few paragraphs of a print story covered with video. Compelling television news weaves the spoken word inextricably with very specific video.

Television reporters' tips: If your sentence says "the chimney was all that remained of the historic home" but your video pans from the home to the chimney, you've got to invert

your sentence. If your interviewee speaks eloquently but talks unbearably slowly, you've got to draw out soundbites that are more succinct. If you think people are hesitant to speak naturally when they see you writing on a notepad, wait until you see how stiff they become when facing a television camera and microphone. One of the biggest challenges for print reporters is writing and speaking conversationally. The Associated Press offers video news reports that broadcast veterans say are often little more than a few sentences voiced by an announcer and covered with video that has little relevance to the words being spoken.

After generations of professional tension between print reporters and broadcast journalists, the print reporters may someday need to actually try it. Ironically, television journalists are now being asked routinely to re-write text versions of their stories for the web.

Jeff Burnside, an SEJ board member, reports for WTVJ NBC 6 in Miami.

ally regulated pollution than ZIPs where income levels exceeded \$70,000.

Q: What kind of response did it get from readers?

A: It was well-received. Said one: "If only our lungs could scream for help."

Beyond the initial round of e-mails, though, the story helped serve as a jump off into other important air stories. We have a pair of 50-year-old power plants that are nearing the ends of their useful lives. They're the region's No. 1 and No. 3 sources of federally regulated pollutants like carbon monoxide and particulates. Their replacements will be equally significant sources of pollution for the next 40 or 50 years. But that is rarely discussed as their replacements are considered. We looked at that debate – and why the pollution angle gets left out – in a follow-up story.

A third story came from follow-up conversations prompted by the project. We examined the regulatory gap surrounding scientists' growing understanding of the problem posed by pollution that starts in the air but falls in the water.

Q: The website also has a video. Is it the first one you made? Tell us about the experience and how you did it.

A: We saw this as an opportunity to experiment with interactive multimedia features. Vladimir Kogan, our content producer, pored over my spreadsheets and created an easily searchable database of the region's ZIP codes. Readers could plug in their ZIP and see charts comparing their neighborhood's pollution with the county average, as well as a list of their biggest local polluters.

I made the photographs for the slideshow, wrote a script and used my best smooth-jazz radio voice to narrate it. We recorded audio with a program called Audacity. Vlad then used a free Windows program called Photo Story, which allows for zooming action and audio narration. We then converted the video Photo Story created into a Flash animation, so we could embed it on the page.

Q: If someone else wanted to do a project like this, what three pieces of advice would you give them?

A: First, find the basic question you want to answer: What's the most polluted ZIP code? What business produced the most air pollution last year? Let that basic question guide your story because you may encounter all sorts of hellacious databases full of codes and weird designations. But if you know what you're looking for from the start, you can make the data work for you, instead of letting it whip you.

Second, make friends with the local or state regulators who oversee whatever medium you're investigating. Chat with them. See what databases they have. Also make sure you find people outside the regulatory agency who can help translate. There's a reason the public doesn't always instinctively know what the most polluted ZIP code or biggest polluter in your region is. Regulators admittedly have a hell of a time effectively conveying their reams of information to the public. While I'm still amazed at how much information is available online, I'm also equally amazed at how inaccessible it still is to people who don't speak in acronyms.

Third, treat your project like a Chia Pet. Pay it a bit of attention each day. Between other stories, water it. Let it grow. Nurture

it. Be patient. It's tough to convince an editor to have you out of pocket for a week at a time. But if you can lay the project's early groundwork, it becomes easier to get the requisite time for major rounds of interviews and writing.

The screenshot shows the homepage of voiceofsandiego.org. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Home, Environment, Community, Business, Health, and News. Below that, a search bar and a main headline for 'A Toxic Air Inventory' are visible. The article text discusses air quality issues in San Diego. A video player is embedded in the article. To the right, there are several smaller article teasers, including one about '10 Properties on the Block' and another about 'UC SD TV'. At the bottom right, there's a promotional banner for 'take5' on CW5, and a vertical banner for 'UC SD TV' with the slogan 'Unlike Anything Else'.

Photo courtesy of VOICEOFSAN DIEGO.ORG

See part 1 of "What's In Our Air?" at www.voiceofsandiego.org/articles/2007/02/24/environment/970pollution.txt.

Rob Davis graduated from the University of Richmond in 2000 and went to work at the twice-weekly Hanover (Va.) Herald-Progress, covering everything under the sun, from the Washington, D.C. sniper shootings to the Miss Mechanicsville pageant. He then moved to the daily Fredericksburg (Va.) Free Lance-Star in 2003, first covering county government and then cops and courts. "With visions of Manifest Destiny floating in my head, I split the East Coast in June 2005, meandered cross-country all summer and landed at voiceofsandiego.org. I've been there a bit more than a year, covering transportation and the environment. Life is good," he writes.

Davis can be reached by phone at (619) 325-0525 or via e-mail at rob.davis@voiceofsandiego.org.

Mike Dunne is assistant editor of the SEJournal.

Green graves, water wars, and saving the Creation

Death, be not proud: A green sequel on funerals

GRAVE MATTERS: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE MODERN FUNERAL INDUSTRY TO A NATURAL WAY OF BURIAL

By **Mark Harris**

Scribner, \$24

Reviewed by **JIM MOTAVALLI**

Looking for some bedside reading with a high “eewwww” factor?

You can’t beat Mark Harris’ “Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial.”

Here’s Harris on the embalming of a young woman who died of a heart attack: “With an audible sucking sound, the trocar (a funeral home’s long, thin suction device) vacuums up the visceral matter it liberates with each puncture: congested blood, accumulated fluid and gases, fecal matter, urine, the semidigested hamburger and fries Jenny ate for her final dinner, and masses of bacteria.”

This goes on for pages!

Call it Jungle Fever for the death industry.

Harris (with two generations of funeral directors in his family tree) is simply describing business-as-usual in the ecological nightmare known as the modern funeral business. The highly toxic fluids (including formaldehyde) that replaced blood in Jenny’s veins and arteries will, over the long term as the body decomposes, likely end up leaching

into the soil. So on top of the financial insult to the bereaved – people in the worst possible position to act as informed consumers – our modern American way of death also contaminates our soil and groundwater.

Harris has produced a wonderfully readable book on an unusual subject. Fans of Jessica Mitford’s “An American Way of Death,” first published in 1963 (and selling out immediately) might appreciate this green sequel. The death industry, long preying on the vulnerable with \$10,000 coffins and other outrages, is now undergoing a makeover.

The book’s chapters, each a stand-alone essay in itself, focus on alternatives ranging from simple cremation to natural burial in a woody setting. Why not a simple pine box, or (as seen on the HBO series “Six Feet Under”) a canvas shroud and a gentle lowering into the Earth? How about a “reef ball,” a sunken concrete haven for marine life with earthly remains going along for the ride? There are worse options than spending eternity providing fish with a useful habitat. The book is packed with practical infor-

mation, too, and each chapter concludes with an extensive resource list.

Grave Matters is a beautifully written narrative journey that documents how an intrepid few are opening some closed doors, getting rid of the polished caskets and other expensive line items and allowing people to leave their bodies with dignity. We begin and end as dust, after all, and the growing natural burial business is assisting the worms to do their work.

Jim Motavalli writes for and edits E Magazine.



Great Lakes’ fate hangs in the balance

THE GREAT LAKES WATER WARS

By **Peter Annin**

Island Press, \$25.95

Reviewed by **TOM HENRY**

To those of us who have ever stood along the Great Lakes shoreline and given much thought to the seemingly endless sight of fresh water in front of us, it seems incomprehensible that this part of the country could ever have trouble quenching its thirst.

Certainly, the Great Lakes region is more water-blessed than any other part of the world. We take water for granted.

But what we don’t realize is that this region could become the battleground for an epic, worldwide struggle this century as the Earth’s population continues to expand, its climate

continues to rise, and water supplies elsewhere continue to dry up or be rendered useless by pollution.

Peter Annin gets it.

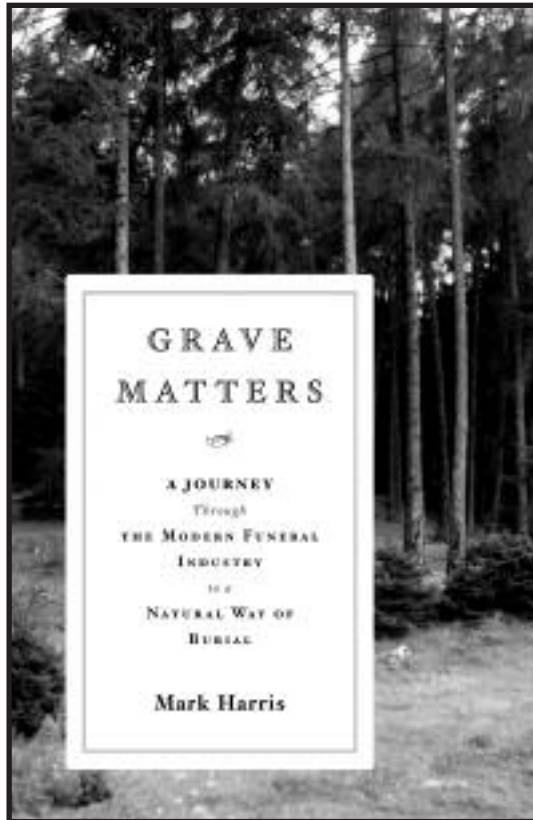
He begins his fascinatingly ambitious book, “The Great Lakes Water Wars,” by taking readers on a trip to the Aral Sea in Uzbekistan, site of what many consider one of jumankind’s biggest engineering blunders.

The Soviets tried to accommodate parched regions of central Asia by diverting the sea’s tributaries nearly 50 years ago, but the plan backfired.

Now, the Aral – once the world’s fourth-largest inland body of water – is a fraction of what it was. Annin describes how, in 2004, he drove hours on what used to be a bed of water less than a half century ago.

Annin said during his Dec. 1 talk at the University of Toledo’s College of Law that he’s not suggesting the Great Lakes are destined to become the next Aral Sea.

(Continued next page)



Nor is he predicting war as in military bloodshed.

But, clearly, history has shown the potential for disaster exists if the lakes are not properly managed. And any legal scholar worth his or her salt will tell you the Great Lakes region is a novice in the realm of water laws, a mere babe in comparison to courtroom battles that have occurred over water for decades out West.

Annin, who lives in Madison, Wis., walks readers through a detailed – albeit complex – history of projects intended to manipulate the lakes.

Some projects, which included grandiose schemes to connect the Great Lakes to watersheds as far north as Alaska and as far south as Mexico, never got off the drawing board.

The most controversial is a project that has diverted Lake Michigan water away from the Chicago area for more than a century. Yet two major diversions in Ontario – Long Lac and Ogoki – have barely merited a shrug, perhaps because they send water into the lakes instead of taking it out.

Many Ohioans are largely oblivious to the fact that Akron has the newest diversion and that it got it largely by agreeing to return what was processed through its sewage-treatment network.

Water laws and their related policy are inherently an arcane subject.

Annin, a former *Newsweek* correspondent who directs Great Lakes expeditions for the Montana-based Institutes for Journalism & Natural Resources, breathes life into the subject.

He puts the diversion debate into a splendid historical context, deciphering much of the bureaucracy that has mired it and even capturing some of the unique political nuances among Great Lakes states during various administrations.

The book is a policy roadmap for readers who want to learn about the proposed Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact, negotiated by Ohio Gov. Bob Taft's administration, to assert regional control of the water. Now under consideration by each state legislature, it could wind up in Congress for a ratification vote someday.

Water, energy and climate change are seen by experts as the 21st Century's three biggest environmental challenges.

Each is interrelated. Whether it's for drinking, for recreation, for industry that brings us jobs, or for energy sources that help reduce carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that cause global warming, water will – undeniably – become more coveted.

Newspapers throughout the region have ramped up their coverage of the diversion/bulk export issue since a small Canadian company called the Nova Group obtained a permit to ship tankers of Lake Superior water to Asia in 1998. My paper, the *Toledo Blade*, published an award-winning, four-day series on the topic in June 2001, on the eve of an historic summit in Niagara Falls,

N.Y., among Great Lakes governors on this topic.

Though the Nova Group relinquished its permit in the heat of cross-border tension, the case exposed loopholes in this modern era of international trade laws – convincing governors that some water projects once thought of as far-fetched could be just around the corner. Fundamentally, the question is this: Who owns the water and can it be traded away like a commodity in the global marketplace?

Annin's book tackles this emerging trade issue in a comprehensive, panoramic way. It expands upon what has been reported piecemeal throughout the region with meticulous research for a one-of-a-kind book about Great Lakes water laws – thus, water politics – that could wind up being the first of many to come.

Tom Henry writes for the Toledo Blade.



Wilson invokes a moral imperative to save nature

THE CREATION: AN APPEAL TO SAVE LIFE ON EARTH
By E.O. Wilson
W.W. Norton & Co., \$21.95.

Reviewed by TOM HENRY

One of the world's most respected scientists, Harvard University's E.O. Wilson, once again shows why he also is one of its greatest nature essayists in "The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth."

It's a beautiful look into one of America's hotter, though lesser-reported topics: The degree to which religion and the environment can converge to

help one another.

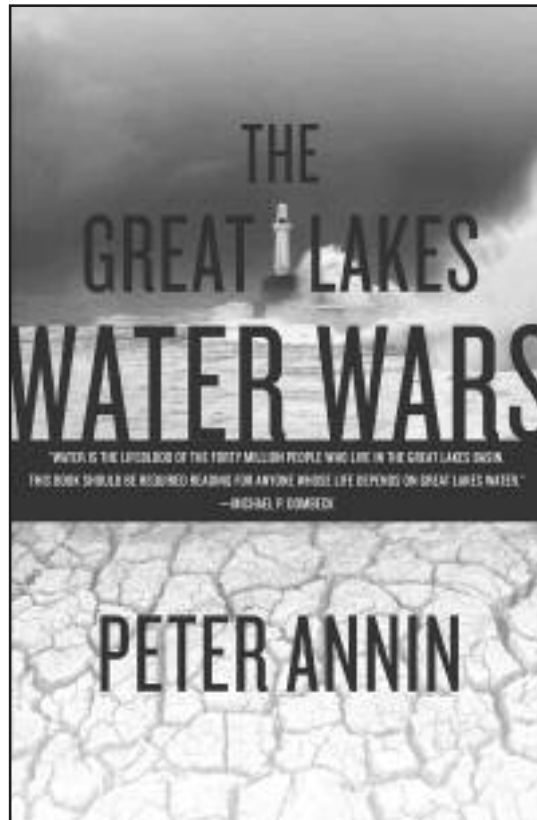
An Alabama native, Wilson – whose absorbing prose is often likened to that of a modern Henry David Thoreau – makes his case for strengthening that bond as if he is writing letters to a Southern Baptist minister.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning entomologist offers fascinating tidbits about anything from ants (one of Wilson's favorite topics) to the powerful wolverine, all in a tapestry of eloquent, conversational writing. Lay readers and experts alike can come away with a better understanding of why conservation matters.

Wilson argues that the future of the planet depends on how well science and religion – Darwin theories and all – can put aside their differences and come together on a common ground over values they share for land stewardship, clean air, safe drinking water and, above all, the sanctity of life.

The latter has always been one of Wilson's biggest missions, given his previous books and speeches about how mankind still knows so relatively little about nature.

(Continued on page 26)



Climate change moves to the front burner at most news outlets

By MIKE DUNNE

Global warming or climate change has been a topic simmering on the environmental journalism burners for quite some time. As 2007 began, it boiled over, becoming front-page news across the nation.

There was a steady stream of stories written about an upcoming report by the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, then stories about what the report really said followed up by stories about possible regional implications.

Two of those able to ride the wave of interest in the topic were reporters **Mike Taugher** and **Betsy Mason** of the *Contra Costa Times* in Walnut Creek, Calif.

The week before the IPCC report was released in Paris, the *Times'* readers were being treated to an in-depth look at the potential impacts of climate change on the Golden State and the West.

"Betsy and I first pitched this project in January 2005," Taugher said. "We thought at the time that the science around the regional effects of climate change was mature enough to write about. The editors liked it, but a couple of big and more immediate stories broke (on my beat, to Betsy's frustration because she wanted to do the climate change series right away) and pushed the project back."

"We made a short-lived attempt to get the series going last summer, but elections and the state's big bonds package put it on hold again. Then, after the last post-election story was done, Betsy and I were asked if we could trim it to a four-part

series and have it done for the holidays. That seemed impossible. We pushed for more time and argued that the State of the Union – there were rumblings that the president would say something substantial about climate change – and the IPCC report would make a great news hook and we could produce a much better series with the additional time. So, if it looked like smart planning, it was really just opportunism and desperate negotiation."

The two got about 10 weeks to produce the series, although each had a week of vacation crammed into that period.

"Tackling a subject as big as the regional effects of climate change on a tight deadline and trying to make it read well was a challenge in many ways. But the concept was simple: We decided the science was mature enough to say, in effect, climate change is here and here is what the best studies we can find say about the range of possibilities that our state faces."

Reader response was mixed, Taugher said. "It ran the gamut from nutty to intelligent skepticism to gratitude and requests for more information. We got a lot of predictable heat from readers who don't "believe" in global warming. Most of those were anonymous.

"We also heard from more thoughtful skeptics. Others wondered why we should worry given the sacrifices that would have to be made and the uncertainty surrounding the severity of impacts. Some readers simply do not believe scientists because,

in their view, scientists say whatever they have to get more funding."

Mason said she was "all prepared for a fight with editors over the content. I thought they'd try to get us to write a more "balanced" series with more voice from the tiny remaining contingent of skeptics willing to go on record, but that fight never materialized to my happy surprise. Most of the negotiating with editors was over the time we needed."

"the timing turned out well with IPCC. Though that was largely luck, as Mike said, we were able to use the February release as a way to get a little more time for the project by arguing, successfully, that putting the series directly in front of the IPCC would put us ahead of a wave of press on climate change," Mason said.

Leading up to the report's release, many other reporters provided a steady stream of stories, like one by **Amelia Nelson-Stowell** of Salt Lake City's *Deseret Morning News*. "Global warming could force the snow sports industry out of business by dramatically reducing the amount of snow and shortening the ski season to a mere two months, according to a new study," she reported Jan. 11.

"By 2100, the ski season could extend only from Christmas to Presidents Day, under the best-case scenario. Even a small 4- to 5-degree warming could be disastrous for the resorts – and winter," she wrote.

(Continued next page)

President... (from page 2)

donations to the 21st Century Fund, by May 31. The offer to match our fund-raising comes from the Challenge Fund for Journalism, a collaboration of the Ford Foundation, the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Hundreds of SEJ members and their friends and relatives have responded to our appeals, but many more have yet to do so. I say "yet" because I believe you value SEJ – what it's done for you and what it stands for – but you haven't realized yet what's at stake.

Journalists aren't great at asking for, or giving, money. They are good at plain speaking, so let me speak to you plainly: What's at stake is no less than the continuation of SEJ's programs and

services at their current level next year and possibly in future years to come.

So it's time for all of us to take stock of what SEJ has done for us, and to give some back. We're not asking that much, really. If every member who hasn't given to date donates \$60, we'll make this challenge-grant goal easily. Journalists respond to deadlines, and this one is upon us. Help SEJ help you, and keep pushing to get climate change and other environmental stories out in the spotlight more often, where they belong.

Tim Wheeler, SEJ's board president, writes for The Baltimore Sun.

Also on Jan. 11, **Dan Richman** of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* wrote about a study looking at the impacts of global warming on Washington state. “Climbing temperatures over the next 40 years will boost the cost of timber, water and crops, cause twice the wildfire damage that occurs now, exacerbate health issues and require expensive shoring-up to avoid damage to Tacoma, Willapa Bay and other low-lying areas,” he wrote.

Seth Borenstein of the Associated Press reported from Paris, where the report was released. His Feb. 2 story, using an advance copy of the “summary for policy makers,” ran on the front page of the *Baton Rouge Advocate*.

The report’s release produced a flurry of stories. On Feb. 3, **Mark Schleifstein** of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* wrote about the implications for the low-lying metro area that was flooded by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. “The international pattern of global warming confirmed by a United Nations panel of world scientists Friday could have dramatic effects on the New Orleans area during the next century. The forecast includes rising seas, more intense hurricanes and a combination of more frequent rainstorms and drought conditions,” he said, quoting a federal scientist based in Louisiana who helped write part of the report.

Some reporters followed up with stories on adaptation efforts. **Kate Alexander** wrote in the *Austin American-Statesman* how the Texas capital will try to take the lead among the nation’s cities in cutting global warming. Her story on Feb. 8 told how “Mayor Will Wynn and several other city officials said Austin will cut its emissions of polluting carbon dioxide to almost nothing by 2020, increase the use of renewable energy sources, boost energy conservation, and require better efficiency for homes and commercial buildings. Elements of the proposal could be controversial.”

The Raleigh News and Observer’s **Wade Rawlins** wrote about ideas to reduce greenhouse gases. His Feb. 23 story covered about 20 recommendations devised by a state-created panel in North Carolina. One idea is consumers paying a fee on their power bills to fund programs that encourage energy conservation. Another goal might be for state government cutting its own energy consumption by 20 percent

within two decades and revising building codes to promote energy efficiency.

Of course, there were a lot more stories than just climate change.

Mike Salinero of the *Tampa Tribune* took a three-day look at the Hillsborough River and its health – or lack of it.

making sure clean drinking water is available to all to conserving groundwater.

Dinah Voyles Pulver of the *Daytona Beach (Fla.) News-Journal* also tackled a water issue – the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of her town. Her Sunday package of stories was the first of an occasional



Courtesy of MINNESOTA PUBLIC RADIO

Minnesota Public Radio’s Stephanie Hemphill profiled an eco-friendly house being built in central Minnesota. The house uses wood grown in nearby forests for flooring, trim, cabinets, and siding, installed by local people, in an effort to get more value from the traditionally extractive forest industry.

Part one, on Jan. 14, started succinctly: “The Hillsborough River is sick.”

Part two explained that while the river is the area’s main source of drinking water there are questions about how to restore it and in what way. “Most scientists agree that restoring a more natural flow of fresh water to the Bay could again make the river a prolific nursery for all types of fish. The question is: How much fresh water is enough?”

Part three looked at cleanup plans.

To see the project, go to: www.tbo.com/news/reports/river.

Water was also the topic of a story by **Jeff Alexander** in the *Muskegon (Mich.) Chronicle* on Jan. 7. He wrote about the conflict of mining spring water on the flow of important area streams.

On Jan. 8, the **Great Lakes Radio Consortium** reported on the United Church of Canada’s decision to boycott bottled water. The reasons range from

series that will run on environmental challenges during the coming year, “Our Natural Treasures: Are We Losing Our Way?” she said.

The first part, “Troubled waters,” ran Jan. 7. See it at: www.news-journalonline.com/special/natural.

Both lead and chromated copper arsenate (CCA) continued to generate environmental stories. On Feb. 4, **Tony Davis** of the *Arizona Daily Star* in Tucson wrote that after nearly three decades of being banned for use in paint and two decades of unleaded gasoline, “lead poisoning in kids remains a significant, although diminished, threat in inner-city Tucson and some other city areas, health officials say.

“Although lead levels in kids’ blood have dropped greatly across the country since the 1970s, virtually all of Tucson’s urban core remains at high risk for lead poisoning of children, according to

(Continued next page)

Beat... (from page 25)

Arizona Department of Health Services records,” Davis wrote.

The day before, in the *Brattleboro (Vt.) Reformer*, reporter **Howard Weiss-Tisman** wrote that “Vermont’s existing lead paint law does not do enough to protect children from lead poisoning and a more aggressive, statewide program will have to be adopted to eliminate lead exposure, according to a report released by the Attorney General’s office.” Weiss-Tisman said Vermont health officials react to lead poisoning sources only after children are sickened. The story called for stronger enforcement of a state anti-lead law and better education programs.

Aimee Cunningham of *Science News* reported Feb. 3 on a new study of Hurricane Katrina debris in New Orleans showed high levels of arsenic contamination. “Before 2004, chromated copper arsenate (CCA) was the preservative most commonly used to prevent pest infestation of construction wood. Because of arsenic’s toxicity, the Environmental Protection Agency has since banned use of the chemical for residential projects,” she wrote. Researchers used a handheld X-ray-fluorescence spectroscope to determine the concentration of arsenic within 225 pieces of lumber from seven sites. Fifty-two pieces contained arsenic, with a mean concentration of 1.24 grams per kilogram of wood.

Carl Prine of the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* continued to look at chemical safety – again showing the ease of access to hazardous substances that could be used as a weapon by extremists. He wrote of his visits to one Las Vegas rail yard: “If he (Prine) was a terrorist, and his goal was to release a potentially catastrophic cloud of deadly gases, explosives and caustic acids

– in unguarded cars, left abandoned – then a U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s planning scenario might apply: 17,500 people dead, another 10,000 suffering injuries and 100,000 more flooding trauma wards, convinced they’ve been poisoned. The environmental damage would take weeks to clean up, forcing the evacuation of as many as 70,000 residents from a city built on sin, military might and heavy industry.”

In the Jan. 14 article, Prine said he left his business card on unsecured tank cars.

It didn’t take long to drive home Prine’s point.

On Jan. 17, **Greg Kocher** and **Linda Blackford** of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* wrote about a derailment south of that city that sent a fireball into the sky, shut down a busy interstate highway, and caused evacuations of homes, businesses and schools. Fifteen of the train’s 80 cars were carrying hazardous materials. Twelve of those derailed, and all of them were involved in the fire. Nineteen people were treated at a local hospital. It was the second train crash in Kentucky in two days – the other also spilling chemicals that required an evacuation.

The newspaper’s **Jim Bruggers** followed up with a Jan. 21 story outlining why local efforts to control hazardous cargo on the rails are being stopped by the federal government. “Several cities have begun to move toward adopting their own railroad safety rules, which would challenge federal control and seek to limit or ban shipments of the most hazardous materials through their urban centers,” Bruggers wrote.

And on Jan. 28, **Anna M. Tinsley** of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* wrote about toxic-toting trains in her community. “Any

one of them could be a target. Every day, more than 100 trains pass through Metroplex neighborhoods, and thousands of others crisscross their way through America, some carrying toxic chemicals that could produce a catastrophe if a terrorist attack released them in a heavily populated area.”

She quoted Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff as saying: “The biggest danger ... is the possibility of a terrorist blowing up a car which causes ... dangerous chemicals to be emitted into the air.”

Air pollution in Texas and plans to permit several coal-burning power plants have kept reporters in the Lone Star State busy.

On Sunday, Jan. 28, **David Doerr** of the *Waco Tribune-Herald* wrote about the debate surrounding those plans. “With 10 of the state’s 16 coal-fired plant projects located in Central Texas, including three in McLennan County, Waco finds itself quite literally in the center of the controversy.”

Alex Nussbaum of *The Record* in Hackensack, N.J., continues to follow up on toxic dumping by Ford Motor Co. The newspaper’s series last year garnered a number of top reporting awards. On Jan. 7, Nussbaum wrote about how waste pulled from Ringwood, N.J., was being shipped to a “treatment plant southwest of Detroit a few miles from where Henry Ford rolled out his first Model T’s a century ago.” He wrote about the communities that ended up with New Jersey exported wastes.

Alex Pulaski of the *Portland Oregonian* began a three-part series looking at the regulation of perchlorate. “The federal government has been inconsistent and at times intentionally silent on how

(Continued next page)

Bookshelf... (from page 23)

Few people, he says, probably realize there are still likely thousands of plants, animals and other forms of life on Earth that have never even been identified.

“Earth is a laboratory wherein Nature (God, if you prefer, Pastor) has laid before us the results of countless experiments. She speaks to us; now let us listen,” Wilson writes.

He makes the case for why it is the “moral imperative” for religion and science to save Earth, suggesting neither one can do it on its own.

“Life on this planet can stand no more plundering,” Wilson writes. “Those living today will either win the race against extinction or lose it, the latter for all time. They will either earn everlasting honor or everlasting contempt.”

It’s hard to come away from this book without a greater appreciation of nature – and without feeling just a little more spiritual.

Tom Henry is an environmental reporter for the Toledo Blade in Ohio.

The Beat

much perchlorate is safe in drinking water. As a result, environmental groups contend, defense contractors and the government have been indefinitely shielded from cleanup costs while infants and pregnant women are exposed to a chemical that impairs thyroid function and can slow infant brain development.”

Autumn Spanne of the New Bedford, Mass., *Standard-Times* wrote Jan. 14 about research by a Dartmouth professor, Yuegang Zuo, who identified several types of natural and synthetic estrogen hormones, most coming from human waste and released by area sewage treatment plants, that could be hindering larval lobster development, as well as shell growth and reproduction in adult lobsters. “Estrogen, which mimics lobsters’ own molting hormone, may interfere with their molting process and make them more susceptible to the bacteria that causes shell disease,” Spanne wrote.

Scott Streater of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* wrote on Jan. 20 about a new study suggesting that people are routinely exposed to potentially harmful chemical flame retardants by ingesting household dust laced with the toxic chemicals, a fact that concerns health researchers who fear that children are at greatest risk.

The study, conducted by researchers at Boston University’s School of Public Health, is the first to link the presence in people of the chemical flame retardants to

exposure to common dust, which can be inhaled in the air or ingested in food.

Janet Raloff of *Science News* reported in the Jan. 20 issue a German team of researchers recently found that in newborn male rats the lowest doses tested of plastic-softening agent di-2-ethylhexyl phthalate (DEHP) suppressed the brain activity of an enzyme critical for male development. “For decades, researchers largely assumed that a poison’s effects increase as the dose rises and diminish as it falls,” Raloff wrote. But now such tests show “unexpected effects—sometimes disproportionately adverse, sometimes beneficial—at extremely low doses of radiation and toxic chemicals.”

Abram Katz of the *New Haven* (Conn.) *Register* wrote on Feb. 5 the use of antibacterial products may be “breeding resistant germs and appear to threaten the environment, experts said.”

Traces of the chemicals triclosan and tricloban have been detected in mother’s milk and 60 percent of the rivers and streams of the United States. “The persistent chemicals also end up in sludge that is used in fertilizer to grow the grains and produce we eat,” he wrote.

Dina Capiello of the *Houston Chronicle* continues to follow air pollution issues in that area. In a Jan. 28 story she wrote how air quality monitors in the Houston area were not expected to meet federal ozone standards by 2009. She

quoted state environmental official Kathleen Hartnett White saying that “Houston is like the perfect recipe for efficient ozone formation” with the city’s large industrial complex, traffic, population growth and weather.

Bob Downing of the *Akron* (Ohio) *Beacon Journal* wrote a number of stories, beginning Jan. 24, about possible fires in one of Ohio’s largest landfills, the Republic Waste Service facility south of Canton, Ohio. He interviewed a pilot who flew over the landfill with infrared equipment. One possible cause: 1 million tons of aluminum dross reacting with leachate and producing high temperatures and excessive foul-smelling odors but no health threat. The newspaper also reported that the Ohio EPA has been very divided on the issue. Some of the stories will be available at www.ohio.com.

Adrienne Tanner of the *Vancouver Sun* in British Columbia wrote on Feb. 10 that milk at two area dairy farms show elevated dioxin levels. That prompted a province-wide order to change how feed is stored in farms with bins made of pressure-treated wood.

Minnesota Public Radio’s **Stephanie Hemphill** profiled an eco-friendly house being built in Aitkin, a small town in central Minnesota. The house features wood that grew in nearby forests, and was made into flooring, trim,

(Continued next page)



Hello Friends,

Prez Tim Wheeler here, with a challenge-grant update: we’ve raised about a third of our \$103,000, but it’s taken almost 10 months to do it — and we only have two months left.

Here’s my challenge to you: if every member who hasn’t given will pledge \$60, we’ll make our goal. Just have \$5 charged to your credit card every month. That’s less than 17¢ a day.

*Remember, if every member gives, we can meet the challenge!
Please give today.*

Beat... (from page 27)

cabinets and siding by local people. It's an effort to get more value from the traditionally extractive forest industry. It ran Jan. 8. See and hear it at <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2007/01/05/aitkinhouse>.

Matt Mendenhall of *Birder's World* wrote an eight-page behind-the-scenes look at whooping cranes that migrate from Wisconsin to Florida. His report included detail on the first adult pair in the population to hatch eggs and raise a chick. It's in the April issue. See: www.birdersworld.com/brd/default.aspx?c=a&id=867.

Elizabeth McGowan of Crain Communication's *Waste News* wrote about how movie directors are adapting to shooting, editing and delivering their prized productions with high-definition video and

digital technology and reducing their reliance on traditional film. That means less waste and close to zero chemicals. "Now Showing: The End of Film and Waste?" can be found on www.wastenews.com.

Mireya Navarro of *The New York Times* reported on how to make weddings greener. "Kate Harrison's idea of a fairy tale wedding goes something like this: Gather more than 150 friends and relatives at an organic farm for a pre-wedding day of hikes and environmental tours. Calculate the mileage guests will travel and offset their carbon dioxide emissions by donating to programs that plant trees or preserve rain forests. Use hydrangeas, berries and other local and seasonal flowers for her bouquet and the decorations, instead of burning up fuel transporting flowers from faraway farms," Navarro wrote Feb. 11.

Tom Henry of the *Toledo (Ohio) Blade* reported that BP's Toledo oil refinery in Oregon (Ohio) has had deeply rooted problems with safety oversight for years, according to a special review of the oil company's five U.S. refineries. "One member of the assessment team went so far as to say the local refinery has the weakest oversight of the group – even worse than the BP refinery in Texas City, Texas, where a 2005 explosion killed 15 people and injured 170 others in what has been described as the nation's worst industrial accident in more than 20 years," Henry wrote on Jan. 17.

Mike Dunne, assistant SEJournal editor, writes for The Advocate in Baton Rouge, La.

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