

Prescription For Action

PREVENT WHAT WE CANNOT CURE

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Spring 2004 • Physicians for Social Responsibility—Los Angeles • Volume 24 No. 2

Vote

as if Your Life Depended on it

Tuesday, November 2nd is election day and promises to be one of the most important dates in recent history.

As you know, Physicians for Social Responsibility came into being during the Cold War. Our first and foremost mission was to stop what was then the ultimate global threat, unlimited thermonuclear war between the US and Soviet Union. Although nuclear weapons remain a terrible menace, environmental problems may incrementally bring about what hydrogen bombs failed to accomplish in a flash.

Speaking at PSR-LA's membership dinner in January, Dr. Jared Diamond soberly posited that human beings have a mere fifty years remaining in which to turn the tide, reduce human impact on the environment or face extinction.

Even the Pentagon is worried. Their recent study, "An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and its Implications for United States National Security," projects polar ice-caps melting within the next few decades, decreasing the Atlantic Ocean's salinity to the point that the Gulf Stream veers from its present course, turning Europe into a second Siberia. Other scientists dispute whether Europe is primarily warmed by thermohaline circulation without the oceans. The Pentagon report contemplates other cataclysmic changes: heat waves, month-long dust storms and massive hurricanes.

Even one of the world's largest insurance companies, Swiss Re, recently warned that the costs of natural disasters, aggravated by global warming, threaten to spiral out of control. In ten years, they

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Weaker Mercury Regulations Threaten Children's Health

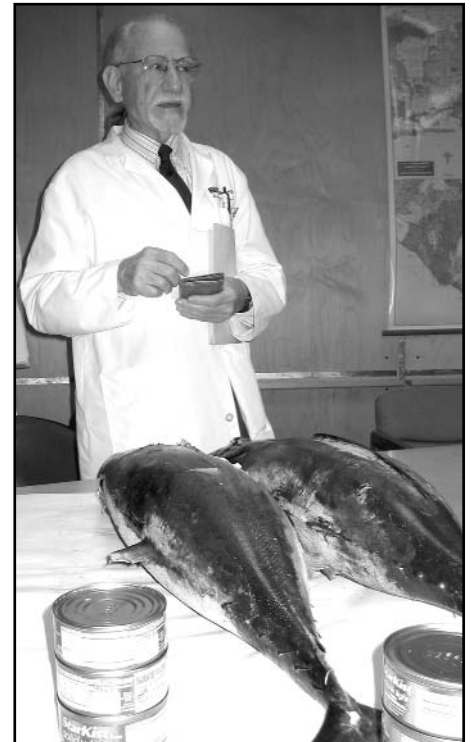
By Johanna Congleton

This January, the US Environmental Protection Agency, under direction from President Bush, published new regulations that will allow more mercury to be emitted to the environment than the agency had previously planned. The rule change will replace the Clean Air Act's target of a 90 percent reduction in power plant mercury emissions by 2008 with a 70 percent decrease by 2018. This means utilities will be allowed to release more mercury and have an extra ten years to do it. The EPA is also proposing to downgrade mercury's toxicity by delisting it as a hazardous air pollutant. The changes are now open for public comment.

Ironically, the US Food and Drug Administration, upon urging from its Food Advisory Committee, unveiled stricter recommendations for women and children on fish consumption due to mercury contamination. Specifically, the FDA and EPA now warn women not to eat more than 6 ounces of albacore tuna or tuna steaks per week. Only 12 ounces of canned chunk light tuna should be consumed per week, or about 2 cans. Mercury emitted from power plants is eventually deposited in water bodies, where it accumulates in fish tissue.

PSR-LA is concerned that the advisory on albacore does not go far enough, as independent testing shows some levels of mercury in some albacore are high enough to warrant a "do not eat" listing, based on FDA standards.

The Bush Administration seems to be ignoring the recommendations and science of its own federal agencies to appease energy producers.



Leonard Fisher, M.D., speaking out about mercury contamination in fish at PSR-LA press event.

PSR-LA is working to stop the weakening of regulations that protect people from mercury exposure. Mercury is a highly toxic heavy metal that can cause nervous system damage in the unborn. The metal has contaminated our food supply and rendered some species of fish unsafe for consumption by women of childbearing age. Untainted, seafood is a healthy food high in protein and vital omega-3 fatty acids. But mercury contamination has become so prevalent that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates one in 12 women of childbearing age risk giving birth to a child with permanent, neurological damage due to exposure in the womb. That puts more than 300,000

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PSR-LA Collaborates on Diesel and Indoor Air Quality Bills

By Gilbert Estrada

PSR-LA is collaborating with other statewide asthma organizations to promote two crucial bills. One seeks to improve indoor air quality in schools and the other reduces diesel emissions.

As part of the Community Action to Fight Asthma initiative, PSR-LA is working with the 12 statewide asthma coalitions to propose legislation to address indoor air quality in schools as well as coordinating statewide efforts to reduce diesel emissions.

PSR-LA staff members are working with PolicyLink and other asthma groups to craft bill language that will establish air quality standard for schools.

In Los Angeles, diesel emissions account for 71% of the entire basin's cancer risk assessment. Current guidelines maintain that no more than 1 in a million individuals should be at risk for contracting cancer from breathing the air. Los Angeles' air puts 1 in 1,400 at risk.

According to the bill current lan-

guage, "formaldehyde levels in 4% of classrooms exceeded the guideline level established by CAL/EPA to prevent short-term adverse health effects."

A recent California portable classroom study found indoor air quality levels to be in poor shape. Average classroom CO2 levels were 1070 parts per million (ppm) (recommended of less than 1000 ppm) and 9.8% of classrooms had one hour averages of more than 2000 ppm. Results were similar for traditional and portable classrooms. "These results indicate insufficient ventilation in a substantial portion of California classrooms," according to the report.

ACTION

Letters of support will soon be available for our members, and other interested parties, to sign on to encourage better indoor and outdoor air quality standards. For more information contact Gilbert Estrada at (213) 386-4901 x 109.

Firearms & Health: Gun Industry not Immune

March 2nd was a landmark date for gun control advocates. The Senate voted 90-8 to reject S. 1805, which would have provided legal immunity to gun manufacturers and dealers from most lawsuits filed against the industry. Despite immunity as a top legislative priority, the National Rifle Association (NRA) and the sponsor of the bill, Senator Larry Craig (R-ID), abruptly withdrew support for S.1805 after several amendments were approved by only hours before the final vote. Senators triumphantly demonstrated, despite the political power of the NRA, the growing support for gun control legislation by voting favorably for amendments addressing the public health epidemic of gun death and injury.

Two gun violence prevention amendments, the renewal of the assault weapons ban and the closing of the gun show loophole, gained Senate support by votes of 52-47 and 53-46, respectively. These measures proved to be a poison pill. After a week on the Senate floor trying to pass S. 1805, Senator Craig then urged his colleagues to vote against it, dooming S. 1805.

Although the bill's failure also prohibits violence prevention amendments from passing, the Senate clearly demonstrated support for legislation that ensures extension of the assault weapons ban and requiring background checks at gun shows. Moreover, this is the first gun legislation since the 1999 Columbine High School shootings.

With the November election in sight as well as the expiration of the assault weapons ban nearing, gun control will be a prominent issue in the 2004 presidential campaign. Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts suspended his campaigning on Super Tuesday in order to return to Washington to vote in favor of the amendment renewing the assault weapons ban.

Despite President Bush's promise to renew the assault weapons ban, the White House recently stated that it did not want any amendments to the immunity bill. Without President Bush urging congressional action, the assault weapons ban will expire in September 2004.



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Los Angeles Department of Water and Power Propose Expansion of Coal Power Plant

By Gilbert Estrada

Burning coal is the most polluting form of power generation currently in use. Unfortunately, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) is proposing a 950 megawatt expansion of one of its coal-fired power plants. The plant, located in Delta, Utah, currently generates 14 million tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂), 29,000 tons of nitrogen oxide (NO_x), and over 4,200 tons of sulfur dioxide (SO₂), the main component in acid rain. The DWP is proposing ownership of the expansion of the facility

A full 50% of DWP's electricity comes from coal; only 2% of their energy comes from renewable energy, such as wind, solar, hydro, and bio-earth. California has mandated that at least 20% of the city's energy derive from renewables by 2017.

To this effort, PSR-LA has collaborated with other air quality groups, including the Coalition for Clean Air, in our

effort to fight for cleaner and more efficient forms of energy. PSR-LA's Martha Dina Arguello, Ed Chung, M.D., and Gilbert Estrada organized a guerilla press event in December at the Los Angeles City Council chambers. PSR-LA, joined by "Santa Claus" and the Coalition for Clean Air, sang Christmas carols fused with clean air messages. Fittingly, the merry protestors delivered lumps of coal as "presents" to the naughty councilmembers. The media covered the protest.

Already, the expansion of the Utah power plant by the DWP has brought on serious criticism by the Grand Canyon Trust, Rocky Mountain Office of Environmental Defense, and the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance. Recently, a coal-burning electric power plant in Monroe, Michigan released 17.5 million tons of CO₂.

PSR-LA will continue to work for the implementation of cleaner and more sustainable sources of energy, resulting in healthier outcomes for the public.

For more information about the proposed City of Los Angeles coal power plant expansion contact Gilbert Estrada at (213) 386-4901.

Jean B. May Trust

In December 2003, PSR-LA was the fortunate recipient of a gift in the amount of \$7,000 from the estate of Jean May. Ms. May was a long-time supporter and an avid philanthropist. We are profoundly grateful for her thoughtful generosity.

In her words and deeds Ms. May strived to create a better world. She embraced PSR's vision of building a world free from war and environmental degradation. Yet Ms. May did not live to see these goals fulfilled.

Ms. May ensured that the struggle for peace would continue by making a bequest to PSR-LA. She's a model for us all. By specifying in your will or revocable living trust that a portion of your estate will be donated to PSR-LA, you will be contributing to a legacy of good health and social justice.

ACTION

For more information, please contact Denise Duffield at (213) 386-4901 ext. 108.

A California Environment Health Agenda

On January 12, 2004, PSR-LA coordinated and released recommendations for *Improving California's Public and Environmental Health*, a policy agenda document submitted to the legislature and Governor's office on behalf of nearly 30 environmental and public health groups in the state. PSR-LA was the lead author of this document that served as the centerpiece of the Environmental Health Legislative Working Group's (EHLWG) lobby day in January. Areas of concern include asthma and air quality, diesel use reduction, lack of environmental health infrastructure, chemical regulatory change, chemical safety testing, biomonitoring, radioactive waste, perchlorate, and funding for the state's prevention services. Key messages communicated on Environmental Health Lobby day included:

- Scientists and policymakers need to take a preventive approach to assessing health threats and mitigating actions.
- Californians have the right to know

about environmental risks in their communities.

- Pollution disproportionately impacts low-income communities, communities of color, women of child-bearing age, children during various stages of development, and the elderly. Our laws need to better address these disparities.
- Costs associated with pollution and the enforcement of environmental laws should be shifted from impacted communities, government agencies, and taxpayers to the industry responsible for a polluting products manufacture.
- Californians are at great risk from cumulative exposure to multiple chemicals. Our laws and policies need to account for additive and synergistic effects of toxic exposure.

Improving California's Public and Environmental Health recommends that state officials and regulators take a preventive approach to protecting public health by improving testing and screening for chemicals found in our environ-



ment and bodies, and emphasizing the importance of increased funding for health tracking services.

ACTION

A copy of this report is available from PSR-LA. Please call (213) 386-4901. Please sign up to receive action alerts about upcoming legislation. Send an email to lainfo@psr.org.

Missing Ms. Congleton

Johanna Congleton, our well-loved and respected employee, is leaving Los Angeles this April to pursue a Masters of Science in Public Health degree at Tulane University. Johanna's work over the past three years has vastly enhanced our health and toxics program. We wish her well in her new life in New Orleans. Nonetheless she will be deeply missed.

Johanna took PSR-LA's Healthcare Without Harm program to new heights, winning multiple EPA grants for collaborative pollution prevention programs with the City of Los Angeles and the state Department of Toxic Substances Control. Through her efforts, more than thirty community clinics now have brand new, mercury-free sphygmomanometers and other medical equipment. The equipment donations were accompanied by in-service trainings on mercury exposure prevention. PSR doctors Anne O'Meara, Leonard Fisher and Nancy Gibbs participated in these educational programs. In sum, the program has been responsible for removing over 300 pounds of mercury from the waste stream and educating hundreds of health professionals on mercury exposure.

Johanna also produced patient literature on mercury exposure translated into Chinese, Thai, Spanish, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Korean and Japanese. The Cambodian government is now using Johannas pamphlet.

With Johanna's help PSR-LA has been ahead of the curve on mercury. At even low levels of exposure mercury can cause neurological impairment and lead to learning disabilities and vision problems. The Food and Drug Administration formally announced this month that pregnant women, nursing mothers and women of childbearing should avoid eating more than 6 oz of canned albacore tuna per week — which has three times the amount of mercury as other varieties. EPA scientists now say that annually some 630,000 US newborns have unsafe levels of mercury in their blood.

Despite this problem the Bush Administration is attempting to weaken the EPA's mercury emission reduction plans. The former rules required coal-fired powerplants to reduce mercury

emissions 90% by 2008 - using widely available smoke stack cleaning technology. The new proposal would achieve a paltry 27% reduction by 2007.

Johanna also worked to reduce the use of medical equipment made of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and phthalate plastics. Last year she persuaded the California Association of Neonatologists to seek the elimination of phthalate-contaminating medical devices used in neonatal intensive care units. And she helped community residents in Santa Clarita close a nearby PVC plant operated by Keysor-Century.

Johanna's contributions to PSR could fill this newsletter. Her decision to return to school is fueled by her desire to be a scientist in the public interest. She intends to synthesize her academic pursuits with her passion for social and environmental justice. She will continue her relationship with PSR and also work with Advocates for Environmental Human Rights to address the devastating health impacts of chemical production in Louisiana.

We loved working with Johanna and remember when she first arrived from San Francisco. She held that cockamamie Bay Area prejudice that Los Angeles is filled with superficial people. Her first week at the office she admonished us for buying Starbucks coffee and marveled at the number of surgically enhanced women on Third Street Promenade. We wanted show Johanna that Los Angeles was more than just Hollywood. Knowing that Johanna was a vegetarian, we treated her to lunch at Real Food Daily, an amazing organic restaurant where you actually feel lighter and healthier after you eat. Feeling healthy and happy that Spring day in 2001, we left the restaurant spying actor David Duchovny also dining at the restaurant. What happened next still makes us laugh. Johanna Congleton, the cool hipster child, fresh from San Francisco, went into a state of absolute apoplexy right there on the sidewalk. Apparently she really liked David Duchovny.

This superficial big bad town will be diminished by her absence.

Wells Fargo Awards PSR-LA for Community Service

Recognizing the critical role that nonprofits play in the community, Wells Fargo presented a \$1,000 check to PSR-LA on Dec. 18, during the company's 2003 Los Angeles Coastal Community Partners and Foundation Breakfast and Gifting Ceremony at City Club in downtown Los Angeles.

"Increased cutbacks in public, foundation and corporate funding have made it extremely difficult for local nonprofit organizations to maintain their current levels of service delivery," said Wells Fargo Community Banking Market President Shelley Benson. "This contribution is just our way of saying thank you for the invaluable services that the PSR-LA provides in the community."

Mercury Fish

from Page 1

children at risk each year. These frightening estimates were recently doubled by EPA scientists, who now believe the risk may actually be one in six women, or 630,000 children. The new calculations are based on science that demonstrates mercury's ability to concentrate in fetal blood at levels 70 percent higher than maternal blood.

For the past several years, PSR-LA member physicians have volunteered at community clinics throughout the state to educate fellow health professionals on how to talk to their patients about avoiding dietary mercury exposure. The administration's attempt to weaken regulations that protect pregnant women and children from mercury certainly makes our job more difficult, and even more vital to protecting the health of future generations.

ACTION

Take a few minutes to protest EPA attempts to weaken regulations on mercury. Find additional background information and directions for submitting comments at:
www.epa.gov/mercury/actions.htm.

STAFF PROFILE: Denise Duffield



PSR-LA is pleased to welcome Denise Duffield as our new Director of Development. Denise has over twelve years experience in non-profit fundraising. She is also an artist and an ardent activist.

"I've always held progressive positions, but until recently I've expressed them through art," Denise says. "When the 2000 elec-

tion placed George W. Bush in the White House, I was shocked by all of the foul play and knew I had to get involved."

After participating in several local demonstrations and campaigns, Denise realized that she could apply her fundraising skills to promote social justice. She spent the past two years at Strategic Actions for a Just Economy, and began at PSR-LA in January. Denise's primary charge is to help increase funding from individuals through events

and building membership.

"Gifts from individuals are critical to our ability to fully pursue our mission," she counsels. "We are up against mighty and well-funded forces—the NRA and chemical industry to name a couple—that consistently work to undermine public health protection," Denise adds. "PSR-LA is wonderful. It offers an alternative agenda. But in order to be successful, we must invest in organizing, education, staff, media, and materials—all of which require funding."

In addition to her on-the-ground experience, Denise has participated in the Grassroots Institute for Fundraising Training program and is a member of the Liberty Hill Foundation's peer group for development directors. "I know that PSR-LA is an organization that can make a difference. Especially as we approach another election year, I look forward to helping make sure that PSR-LA has the resources it needs to do its vital work."

Vote . . .

Continued from Page 1

conjecture, such disasters may double in cost to \$150 billion a year, hitting insurers with \$30-40 billion in claims, or the equivalent of one World Trade Center attack annually. Correspondingly, a commission within the conservative World Bank has called for the phase-out of fossil fuels within the next eight years. And Hollywood's taking notice. This summer's blockbuster "The Day After Tomorrow," promises to sensationalize global warming's devastating effects.

Changes in our climate are real and they are underway. Everybody seems to get it.

Well, almost everyone. The current administration, many of whom are oilmen by trade, have enacted policies that frankly resemble the problem more than the solution. The current administration killed the Kyoto Treaty. Early on they expunged the phrase "global warming" from government documents. They shelved prior commitments to cut carbon emissions. They now permit coal-fired power plants to operate without scrubbers. And one could argue that their Middle East policy is conducted in such a way that favors oil interests over those of national security.

Clearly there is a relationship between the health of the planet and human strife.

Imagine if current trends continue.

Imagine what will happen when potable water becomes more scarce, when forests lose their last trees, and when global warming shatters ecosystems. Already a full sixty percent of the world's 43 million refugees are today homeless because of environmental disasters.

The relationship between ploughshares and bombs run the other direction as well—war and strife in turn take their toll on the environment. In the 16th century Ireland's great oak forests were cut to build Her Majesty's ships. Here, today, in California, the military is by far the single greatest polluter.

Imagine then if a foreign government or terrorist threatened to melt the polar ice-caps or poison LA's water supply or put radioactive materials in baby-strollers. The response would be immediate and overwhelming. But when the threat is slow-moving, and when industry or the military itself is responsible for the pollution, the government will likely fail to protect. You best cook a lobster by slowly turning up the heat.

And in case you already didn't know, here in California we do have rocket fuel (perchlorate) in our drinking water. And Cold War radioactive materials have been recycled, with the government's blessing, into consumer products.

The upcoming election presents two

widely differing philosophies on how the world's most powerful nation will relate to the environment and how it will conduct its foreign policy. Participating in this process is critical. And yet it is merely a first-step. The problems we face are of such magnitude that regardless of who wins, there will be considerable work to do after the election.

You can make a difference. PSR-LA is doing voter registration at LA's medical school campuses as well as get out the vote activities. We encourage you to get involved. Please call Candice Kim at (213) 386-4901 x125.

Resources

Get a copy of the report, "Degrees of Danger; How Smarter Energy Choices Can Protect our Health in California" April 2003. Sixty pages. Free of charge. Call the office at (213) 386-4901.

Buy our great PSR tee-shirt "Vote as if Your Life Depended on It. On Nov. 2, 2004, it will." Call the office at (213) 386-4901.

Get involved. Sign-up with PSR-LA to do voter registration at medical school campuses. Call (213) 386-4901, or write lainfo@psr.org.

Calendar of Events: Spring 2004

Saturday, May 8, 2004 • 11:00 AM - 2:30 PM

LA's Ten Best Untold News Stories

The Environmental and National Security Stories You Haven't Heard About

Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel
7000 Hollywood Blvd

Physicians for Social Responsibility is sponsoring a briefing for local journalists (and the general public) on national security and environmental stories that directly impact Southern California. Ten prestigious speakers will give succinct rapid-fire presentations, and field questions during and following the briefing. The Public is encouraged to attend. For more information contact PSR-LA at (213) 386-4901.

Thursday, April 15 • 6:30 PM

PSR-LA and the Center for Defense Information invite you to a lecture by

Professor Wayne Glass, University of Southern California, who will speak on "National Security, Foreign Policy, and the Congress: How Things Work (or Don't)."

Dr. Glass served as chief of staff on the Senate Armed Services Committee and has held positions at the State and Defense Departments along with the National Security Division of the Congressional Budget Office. UCLA Faculty Center, 6:30 PM. Dinner costs \$22. Please call PSR-LA for more information at (213) 386-4901, or write lainfo@psr.org.

Tuesday, May 18 • 6:30 PM

PSR-LA and CDI invite you to a lecture by Brig. General Feroz Kahn, retired, Army, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, who will speak on "Pakistan and the Bomb." UCLA Faculty Center, 6:30 PM. Dinner costs \$22. Please call PSR-LA for more information at (213) 386-4901, or write lainfo@psr.org.

In Memoriam

PSR-Los Angeles is saddened by the passing of Sandy Elster, a longtime activist whose efforts bolstered campaigns for such causes as clean air, military reform, campaign finance and human rights. Sandy died of pulmonary fibrosis January 27 at his Venice home. He was 86.

His dedication and spirit will be greatly missed.

"Uncovered: The Whole Truth About the Iraq War"

This now renowned documentary, premiered at PSR-LA's Gala Dinner, takes you behind the walls of government. Hear CIA, Pentagon and foreign service experts speak out, many for the first time, detailing the lies, misstatements and exaggerations that served as the reasons to fight a "preemptive" war that wasn't necessary. Produced by this year's PSR-LA Peacemaker Award recipient, Robert Greenwald, the film is taking the nation by storm. Now you have the chance to own a copy through PSR-LA. Donate \$30, and PSR-LA will immediately send you a DVD in the mail. Call PSR-LA at (213) 386-4901 x112, or write parfrey@psr.org.

The logo for Physicians for Social Responsibility—Los Angeles, featuring the letters 'PSR' in a bold, stylized font followed by 'LA' in a larger, lighter font.

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