

Prescription For Action

PREVENT WHAT WE CANNOT CURE

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Winter 2004 • Physicians for Social Responsibility—Los Angeles • Volume 23 No. 5

One Fantastic Evening

PSR-LA's Annual Gala

Two hundred and sixty enthusiastic PSR members and supporters gathered at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel on October 26th to celebrate the accomplishments of four brilliant advocates for peace and environmental sustainability.

Highlights of the evening included:

- Special guest Ambassador Joseph Wilson spoke of his dismay when the Bush Administration leaked that his wife Valerie Plame was a C.I.A. operative—a felony offense. Sent to investigate claims that uranium ore was being transferred from Niger to Iraq, Ambassador Wilson reported that no such transports had taken place. President Bush nonetheless cited Iraqi uranium imports as a rationale for invasion in his State of the Union address.

- Film-maker Robert Greenwald, *Peacemaker Award* recipient, unveiled his documentary, "Uncovered" at the gala, sharing a fifteen minute clip. This brilliant documentary, composed of testimony of military and intelligence officials, debunks the administration's weapons-of-mass-destruction rationale for war in Iraq.

- Jazz legend Herbie Hancock performed an amazing fifteen-minute improvisation on the piano. He said, "I play throughout the world. And I can tell you that the rest of the world today looks at the United States not with wonder but instead with fear and great anxiety."

- Dr. Neal Baer, *Socially Responsible Medicine Award* winner, said that his mother would be thrilled that he was being "honored by Dr. Helen Caldicott's anization." Baer is Executive

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Healing the Planet Award: Honoree Congresswoman Barbara Lee accepting the *Healing the Planet Award* at PSR-LA's Annual Gala Awards Dinner, October 26.

Court Decision to Impact Respiratory Health in Southern California

By Johanna Congleton

This December, the U.S. Supreme Court will make a precedent-setting decision that will affect air quality, and subsequently respiratory health in Southern California—and potentially the rest of the nation. PSR-LA and other public health organizations are taking legal action to ensure these health protections remain intact.

At stake is the ability of state and local agencies to set purchasing requirements for fleet vehicles. In 2000, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) adopted six fleet rules, requiring public agencies in the district to procure cleaner vehicles when replacing old or buying new ones. The rules apply to garbage trucks, airport shuttles, street sweepers, buses, and could impact purchasing guidelines for non-diesel school buses.

After the regulations were passed, SCAQMD was sued by two industry trade groups: the Western States

Petroleum Association and the Engine Manufacturers Association. The groups filed suit under the pretense that the fleet rules are pre-empted by the Clean Air Act, which bars states from setting emission standards that conflict with federal regulations. Unfortunately, the federal government recently joined the industry groups under direction from the Bush Administration. SCAQMD and numerous public health organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics (California Division), California Medical Association, PSR, American Lung Association, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Society of Occupational and Environmental Health maintain that these rules do not set new emission standards but are a matter of purchasing policy.

Public health organizations also strongly support the SCAQMD's position in light of climbing rates of asthma and diseases associated with exposure to

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What Goes Down, Sometimes Comes Up

Toxic Gasses Afflict Los Angeles

Out of sight, out of mind. So it follows that Californians rarely think about the water that resides beneath the hundreds of square miles of Los Angeles concrete. Today, few municipalities pump groundwater for potable use. One reason is that local groundwater sources have been horribly contaminated by decades of industrial and military activity.

For example the entire San Gabriel Valley aquifer is an EPA Superfund site due in large measure to Aerojet General's missile factory. Lockheed has similarly corrupted the eastern half of the San Fernando Valley.

For years it was assumed that contaminants in our groundwater, especially volatile organic compounds (VOC), remained stable in underground aquifers. Now we know better. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's recent report, "Draft Guidance for Evaluating the Vapor Intrusion to Indoor Air Pathway from Groundwater and Soils," suggests that some VOCs actually turn to gas underground and then ascend into homes, offices, schools, and work places, dosing inhabitants with toxic vapors.

PSR-LA researched which communities are most blighted by VOC groundwater contamination and may potentially be at risk.

In Los Angeles County VOC's blight superfund sites in Burbank, San Gabriel, Glendale and Del Amo. But VOC's have

also contaminated sites in Pacoima, Compton, Industry, Torrance, South Gate, Carson, Long Beach, East LA, El Segundo, Lynwood, Wilmington, Van Nuys, Sun Valley, Santa Fe Springs, Santa Clarita and Paramount.

In Ventura County, the Santa Susana Field Laboratory is responsible for an estimated 500,000 gallons of trichloroethylene (TCE) in the groundwater (Despite PSR-LA's repeated requests state agencies have not yet tested for worker exposure to this deadly toxicant).

But VOC's can do more harm than simply intruding into homes. These chemicals are so dangerous—particularly TCE, which was recently found by EPA to be 65 times more dangerous than previously assumed—that even a small dose, found in outdoor (ambient) air, may be too much.

Unfortunately, few are aware of VOC contamination. That's why on October 2, PSR-LA hosted an information meeting for affected residents and environmental agencies and organizations at the Radisson Valley Center in Sherman Oaks. EPA toxicologist Patrick Wilson presented the toxicological data. Lenny Siegel, director of the Center for Public Environmental Oversight, described the cleanup process in Mountain View where VOC's dosed homes and schools.

Community members including LeRae Spera from Norco, Barbara Johnson from

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Gala Dinner

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Producer of the series "Law and Order: Special Victims Unit," and volunteers with Venice Family Clinic.

- Helen Thomas, a veteran of the White House press corps and *Caldicott Award* winner, catalogued the administration's "horrifying dismantling" of great society reforms, foreign policy gaffes, and egregious relaxing of environmental protections.

- Actor Mike Farrell gave a glowing heartfelt introduction of this year's courageous *Healing the Planet Award*

recipient, Congresswoman Barbara Lee.

Members lavished praise on the evening presentations. "Inspirational," "exceptional," and "the best ever" were among the superlatives. Can't wait till next year.

"Uncovered: The Whole Truth About the Iraq War" the now renowned documentary, which 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, mis-statements and exaggerations that served as the reasons to fight a "preemptive"



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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.

Toxic Gasses

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the Rocketdyne area, and Marta Segura and Felipe Aguirre from Southeast LA, presented their area's particular dilemmas regarding these toxic contaminants.

PSR-LA will continue to work to expose this once-buried, now-ascending environmental problem.

One monumental question remains to be asked, let alone answered: is the gas fuel contaminant, MTBE, sufficiently volatile and toxic to ill-effect hundreds of thousands of Californians residing above MTBE plumes?

To get involved, contact Jonathan Parfrey at (213) 386-4901 x112 or parfrey@psr.org.



"Is it Toxic to live in California?": Town Hall Event co-sponsored by Los Angeles Times Town Hall and the California Wellness foundation on October 30, 2003. From Left to Right : Martha Dina Arguello, Director of Health and Environment Programs PSR-LA, Jack Broadbent, Director, Air Division, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9, Moderator Fatima Angeles, Dr. Adrian Moore, Vice President, Reason Foundation, Bill Walker, Vice President/West Coast, Environmental Working Group.

The Assault Weapons Ban and the Threat of Gun Industry Immunity: Take Action to Protect the Public from Gun Violence

There is legislation in the US Senate that, if passed, would drastically limit the legal rights and abilities of those victimized by gun violence. This bill, S. 659, along with similar bills S. 1805 and S. 1806, would prohibit victims of gun violence from suing gun manufacturers, distributors, dealers, or importers for civil damages except in limited circumstances.

S. 659 would also require an immediate dismissal of pending lawsuits and give the gun industry a unique legal protection not granted to other American industries.

Whatever the bill number, this special-interest legislation threatens to take away the legal rights of gun violence victims and gives sweeping legal immunity to the gun industry. This legislation would grant the gun industry unprecedented immunity from civil litigation, preventing victims of gun violence from seeking justice in our nations courts.

S. 659 would remove a major incentive for gun manufacturers and dealers to make their products safer, improve their distribution practices, and keep guns out of the hands of criminals. This legislation radically rewrites longstanding legal

principles. Under current law, a manufacturer may be liable for failing to include feasible safety devices that prevent injuries caused by the foreseeable use or misuse of its products, even if those uses are "not intended."

Since the federal government regularly fails to protect the public from firearms, the only recourse for victims of gun injury, as well as cities and counties deeply affected by gun violence, is through the judiciary system. The purpose of lawsuits against gun makers is to change the way the gun industry conducts business and force it to take into account the health of its consumers. The lawsuits focus on such areas as unsafe gun design, negligent or irresponsible gun distribution, and deceptive marketing and advertising. S. 659, S. 1805 and S. 1806 would provide unique legal protection for the gun industry at the expense of innocent Americans.

The current federal assault weapons ban, established in 1994, prohibits the manufacture and distribution of specific models of military-style assault weapons, high capacity magazines, and

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Save the Date: PSR-LA's Annual Membership Meeting and Dinner on January 27, 2004.

On Tuesday, January 27, PSR-LA will conduct our Annual Membership Meeting from **6:00-7:00 PM**. At this time members will review bylaws, and elect board members and officers.

Afterwards join us for PSR-LA's Annual Membership Dinner. This year's featured speaker is MacArthur fellow and UCLA evolutionary biologist **Dr. Jared Diamond**, author of the Pulitzer Prize winning "Guns, Germs and Steel". He will speak on "The Fate of Empires." Special guests to be announced.

Dinner Tickets for PSR-LA Members: \$45 per person/\$80 per couple. Tickets for Non-members: \$55 per person/\$100 per couple.

Both events will take place at the UCLA Faculty Club at 480 Charles Young Dr., near the corner of Hilgard and Westholme, in Westwood.

Call (213) 386-4901 x112 for information on the membership meeting.

Take Action: Tell Schwarzenegger Precaution is Important

Industry Memo Attacks Environmental Health Regulations

This November, a memo was submitted to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger by the Thursday Group, an organization representing a broad range of industrial interests. Not surprisingly, the document urges the administration to keep public health and environmental concerns at bay by supporting Clean Air Act roll-backs, waiving public health data submission requirements on pesticides, and reconsidering radioactive waste disposal sites such as Ward Valley.

Central to this list of recommendations is an attack on the precautionary principle. Opponents argue that the principle is nothing more than a conceptual framework bereft of scientific meaning that “can adversely impact all sectors of society by depriving them of meaningful benefits to human health, environmental quality, and improvements in the quality of life.”

Yet health advocates resoundingly encourage the new administration to take a precautionary approach to protecting public health. The precautionary principle is an important tool for making science-based, health-protective environmental policy decisions. The principle recommends taking anticipatory action when an activity raises a credible threat of harm to prevent injury to human health and the environment. This policy paradigm recognizes the serious scientific and political limitations of risk assess-

ment, and acknowledges the need for taking action even in the face of scientific uncertainty. It calls for democratic participation in decisions from all affected parties and a full exploration of alternatives.

Real alternatives assessment ensures that lower-risk alternatives are examined and that the discussion about risks and benefits is balanced with the need to protect public health. For example, California recently enacted legislation that bans two types of chemicals that have been accumulating in breast milk at an exponential rate. The chemicals, polybrominated diphenyl ethers or PBDEs, interfere with thyroid function in lab experiments at levels below those detected in human beings. Therefore, the state decided to take precautionary action and phase out two PBDEs in the interest of public health. Less-toxic alternatives to PBDEs will be used instead, as is the practice in European countries that have banned the chemicals due to similar concerns. Policies such as these run contrary to industry's belief that precautionary action is detrimental to health and the environment.

Please take action and let the Schwarzenegger Administration know that health advocates support the precautionary principle and would like it to be used more broadly in public policy formation.

Please contact Terry Tamminan at (916) 323-2514; tt@calepa.ca.gov; Cal/EPA, 1001 I Street, P.O. Box 2815, Sacramento, CA 98512-2815.

Give the Gift that Gives Back to You

PSR - Los Angeles has recently been honored with a charitable gift annuity through a recent partnership with the California Community Foundation.

We're thrilled. This gift will not only support PSR's important work but in turn will benefit the donor.

Here's how it works.

A gift to Physicians for Social Responsibility-Los Angeles is made via the California Community Foundation (which requires an initial minimum gift of \$5,000). The donor can immediately take a charitable tax deduction for the full amount and in exchange for the gift the California Community Foundation will pay a guaranteed annual portion of the gift for the rest of one's life. And a sizeable portion of each income payment is tax-free.

The annual payment is based on age, and is especially favorable to older individuals. Upon the donor's death the remainder of that annuity goes into an endowment to support the work of PSR-LA.

As you can tell an annuity is another great way to support PSR-LA. For more information, please contact PSR-LA Administrator Jon Graff by telephone at (213) 386-4901 x123, or by e-mailing jon@graffconsulting.com.

Court Decision

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diesel exhaust and outdoor air pollution. The SCAQMD's Multiple Air Toxics Exposure Study (MATES II) found that diesel exhaust accounts for the wide majority of cancer risk in the south coast, more than 71 percent. Approximately 3 million people who live in California suffer from asthma; nearly 700,000 of them are children.

The U.S. District Court and Ninth

Circuit Court of Appeals decided in favor of SCAQMD's right to require the purchase of non-diesel technology fleet vehicles. However, if the Supreme Court sides with industry it will likely create a ripple effect causing state and local agencies to be prohibited from setting purchasing requirements for clean-technology vehicles.

So much for States Rights.

PSR-LA and its public health allies await the Court's decision in December.



MEMBER PROFILE: Ed Chung M.D.



We are pleased to announce a new member of our staff here at PSR-LA, Dr. Edward Chung, who is volunteering his time as a full-time intern. He is a graduate of Brown University, both undergraduate and medical school, and completed an emergency medicine residency with Long Island Jewish Medical Center, affiliated with the

Albert Einstein School of Medicine in New York City. Whether it is teaching children or raising money for the Boston to New York AIDS rides, Dr. Chung has always been involved in charitable causes, but there are two singular moments that spurred him on to become more active.

On December 7, 1993, Dr. Chung was home on break at college, when his mother picked up the phone and told him to turn on the TV right away. "Her face was blank, and I knew something was wrong" he says. A man armed with a Ruger P-89 pistol had entered a busy commuter train on the Long Island railroad that evening, and had started shooting. The counts started coming in: nineteen people injured, six people killed. Among the dead was a

young woman who was a family friend. Her mother had called saying she had not come home. "She was a talented artist who would draw pictures for us around the holidays. Christmas was a little blue that year," he says.

On September 11, 2001 Dr. Chung was working as an emergency medicine resident, in Manhattan. The details do not need to be told, but it was then that Dr. Chung decided to become directly involved in the community and the world...except New York had more pressing concerns. "I didn't feel that it was the right time to be in New York anymore. The greatest need there was for stability and it wasn't time for me to be shaking things up", he said.

Dr. Chung is now working on projects ranging from training physicians on gun violence issues to spreading awareness on environmental hazards. In particular, he looks forward to meeting medical students and underscoring their wonderful opportunity as doctors, to speak out to the world on behalf of healing. But Dr. Chung still reserves a special sorrow for the victims of gun violence. "The explicit message is that guns are OK in this country...but in my years working in the ER, not once has a victim of gun-violence said that they would ever use a gun again?"

Firearms Legislation

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weapons with certain combinations of features designed for military use.

The current ban expires this coming year. The 1994 law named 19 specific models, and also banned "copies or duplicates" of those models. In addition, the law outlawed guns that have two or more specified assault weapon features. Guns that were legally possessed before the effective date of the law remain legal. Since the establishment of the assault weapons ban, gun manufacturers have exploited loopholes by making minor modifications to banned guns while retaining the key military features that defined those guns as assault weapons. Many violence prevention advocates are calling for strengthened legislation that closes these loopholes.

Again, the current ban sunsets on September 13, 2004. Unless legislation that renews and strengthens the assault weapons ban is passed before then, dozens of models of military-style

assault weapons will then be legal to sell in our communities and on our streets.

Currently there are three pieces of legislation that have been introduced to address the need for a ban on assault weapons: S. 1431 introduced by Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and H.R. 2038 introduced by Representatives Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY) and John Conyers (D-MI). These identical bills will repeal the sunset date on the 1994 Federal Assault Weapons Ban and ban the importation of large capacity ammunition feeding devices. In addition, the bill will significantly strengthen the current federal assault weapons ban by clarifying the definition of the term "assault weapon." Furthermore, the bill would ban conversion parts kits; regulate "grandfathered" assault weapons and enhance the tracing of such weapons; and prohibit juvenile possession.

S. 1034 introduced by Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), will repeal the sunset date on the 1994 Federal Assault Weapons Ban. The bill will also ban the importation of large capacity ammunition feeding devices.

TAKE ACTION:

The US Capitol Switchboard can be reached at (800) 839-5276. Call your Representatives and Senators and ask them to:

- **Oppose** Immunity for the Gun Industry by opposing S. 659, S. 1805 and S. 1806 and support a filibuster of these same bills.

- **Support** H.R. 2038 and S. 1431, the Assault Weapons Ban and Law Enforcement Protection Act of 2003, to make the Assault Weapons Ban permanent and strengthen the current law by banning copycat assault weapons.

- **Sign on** to Physicians for Social Responsibility's letter in support of H.R. 2038/S. 1431. Our goal is to attain 500 Physician signatures to show Congress and our elected officials that the medical community is concerned about the availability of assault weapons in America.

Sign onto the letter on-line at:
<http://www.psr.org/home.cfm?id=Violeceformdetails>

Calendar of Events: Winter 2004

Tuesday, January 13

Peace and Security Committee. We will meet at the Home of Pauline and Richard Saxon (in Encino) to discuss how we can together bring about a new SMART security policy for our nation. Refreshments at 7:00 PM. Meeting will commence at 7:30 PM. For reservations, directions, and information, please call (213) 386-4901 x112, or write parfrey@psr.org

January 25-28

National Forum on Contaminants in Fish.

The Forum is a public, annual event that brings together public health and environmental professionals from States, Tribes, and other stakeholders to discuss fish contamination and public health issues. Highlights include updates on the Joint National Mercury Advisory, health risks and selected chemicals of concern. The conference will be held in San Diego. For more information visit: www.epa.gov/waterscience/fish/forum/2004/

January 27 & 28

"Diesel: What the Future Holds" by AQMD, Diamond Bar, CA. Hear government policy makers and industry leaders discuss the role diesel will play in meeting California's energy and environmental requirements. Conference panel topics will include: Policy overview, health impacts, diesel emis-

sion sources, technology advancements overview, alternative fuels. For more information check <http://www.capcoa.org> or call Larry Kolczak at (909) 396.3215.

Tuesday, January 27, 6:00-7:00 PM

PSR-LA Annual Membership Meeting.

Review bylaws. Elect board members and officers at the UCLA Faculty Club, near the corner of Hilgard and Westholme, in Westwood. Call (213) 386-4901 x112 for information.

Tuesday, January 27, 7:00-9:30 PM

Annual Membership Dinner. Dr. Jared Diamond, author of "Guns, Germs and Steel" will speak on "The Fate of Empires." Special guests to be announced. Members: \$45 per person/\$80 per couple. Non-members: \$55 per person/\$100 per couple. UCLA Faculty Club, near the corner of Hilgard and Westholme, in Westwood. Call (213) 386-4901 x112 with questions.

Thursday, February 26, 7:00-9:30 PM

"Nukes, Nikes and Magic Lasers; LAs Best Under-Reported National Security Stories," Physicians for Social

Responsibility is organizing a major briefing for local journalists on national security stories that directly impact Southern California. A hosted wine tasting follows the briefing.

Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, 7000 Hollywood Blvd, Los Angeles. Call (213) 386-4901 for more information.

PSR Needs Your Involvement

If you are a member of a medical association such as the California Medical Association or the American Academy of Pediatrics, PSR would like to know if you are willing to help pass important environmental health resolutions. These include: resolutions to promote diesel use reduction, improving indoor air quality to reduce asthma triggers, or promoting a protective standard to clean-up the contaminant perchlorate in our drinking water.

If you are interested and would like more information, please contact PSR-Los Angeles at (213) 386-4901 or by e-mailing lainfo@psr.org.

PSR Holiday Wish List

- Office Furniture
- Conference Room Chairs
- Filing Cabinets
- Shelving
- Pens, Notepads and Office Supplies

The logo for PSR LA, with 'PSR' in a bold, black, sans-serif font and 'LA' in a larger, grey, serif font.

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