

The Trailblazer

The Niagara Group of The Sierra Club • <http://newyork.sierraclub.org/niagara/> • Vol. 48 No. 2 April 2013

Niagara Group Sponsors West Valley Panel Presentation

By Robert Ciesielski

A call to action was issued by four exceptional and seasoned speakers concerning cleanup of the West Valley Nuclear Waste site at our presentation on February 26th, 2013. An underground plume of Strontium 90 radioactive waste has been spreading from the West Valley facility towards tributaries of Cattaraugus Creek since the 1990s. This plume has now been located in substantial strength well beyond the retainer barrier constructed after the last round of public hearings before the US Department of Energy (DOE) and NYSERDA. Public announcements that the Strontium plume would be removed were quietly gimmicked to result only in the installation of the experimental radiation filter – which now has failed. A Freedom of Information (FOIL) request shows that no contracts were ever signed for removal of the plume. The 2010 DOE cleanup budget of \$100 million per year for 10 years has been underfunded from the start, and has

resulted in only \$50 million of annual funding. The government's own General Accounting Office recommended that the expenditure of \$500 million a year in cleanup could save billions of future costs, but the GAO findings were ignored by the DOE.

Speakers Barbara Warren of the Citizens' Environmental Coalition, Diane D'Arrigo of Nuclear Information and Resource Service, Joanne Hameister of the local Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes, and Agnes Williams of the Indigenous Women's Initiative all gave factual and stirring accounts of the continuous conscious efforts of the DOE to avoid nuclear waste cleanup at West Valley. Of the DOE's \$27.5 billion budget, only \$199 million is provided annually to clean up non-defense related sites.

As a result of the talk, Niagara Group Chair Lynda Schneekloth has forwarded letters to US Senators Charles Schumer and

Kirsten Gillibrand, and US Representatives Brian Higgins and Thomas Reed, requesting the immediate cleanup of the Strontium 90 plume before it reaches the drinking water of Cattaraugus and Erie Counties. The Niagara Group also requests the excavation and securing of the highest levels of radiation contained in 42 fuel assemblies; the appointment of Dr. David Carpenter, health expert, to the West Valley Health Panel; and the removal of a gag order that prevents the public from speaking with Health Panel scientists.

The entire West Valley site could currently be removed and cleaned up for \$10 billion. If radioactivity is released into Cattaraugus Creek and Lake Erie, cleanup costs will be at least triple, and the adverse health effects of our foolish adventure with nuclear power will become infinitely tragic. Please write to your NY Senators and Representatives now on this urgent environmental issue.

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RECYCLING & REUSING TIPS & TIDBITS By Ron Missel

THE OTHER STUFF – AND WHAT TO DO WITH IT....

Remember the “word of wisdom” whispered to Dustin Hoffman in *The Graduate* back in 1967? In case you don't, it was “plastics”. Prophetic? A sign of things to come? It's hard to acquire anything today that's not made of plastic, or that doesn't include plastic component parts. There are some obvious benefits using plastic to make products: *It lasts, it's durable, it has many uses, and it's inexpensive.* However, it also has many drawbacks - most notably, the same as one of its strengths: *It lasts.* Ed Begley, Jr., a Hollywood celebrity and a serious environmentalist, said once on his TV show, *Living With Ed*, that his new plastic fence surrounding his property is both good and bad – and for the same reason: *It lasts forever!* As long as it stays a fence, that's good. If it gets scrapped, then it's not. Some other drawbacks include: 1) It befouls the landscape. How many recyclable shopping bags, styrofoam food containers, and water or drink bottles do you see lying in roadside ditches, strewn across open fields or lots, or floating in our waterways. **FACT: Only 8% of plastic waste generated in the US in 2010 was recovered for recycling;** 2) It doesn't break down well. Many landfill items – like paper, wood, and food – decompose much more readily. Certain plastics can last for 100s of years; 3) Many plastics leach the toxic chemicals they're made of. Some of this occurs while the product is in use, but more often when the plastic item is improperly disposed of and begins to break down. And many of the chemical

additives that give plastic its properties are not sufficiently tested. Remember BPA? The chemical was incorporated into a large number of plastic drink containers – including baby bottles – but later determined to be potentially harmful to humans.

Do we need as much plastic? Is it better making products from plastic than cutting down a lot of trees to make a similar product? Paper or plastic? The answers to these questions are not always easy or straightforward. What is critical, however, is “end of life” management of plastics – if not recycled, then at least there should be a proper disposal of this matter.

One of the current environmental tragedies resulting from improper disposal of plastic items is the “Great Pacific Garbage Patch”. This is basically an island of floating plastic in the Pacific Ocean that is two times the size of Texas. Plastic gets caught up in the ocean currents and the “island” more or less stays intact. In a way, you might think “out of sight out of mind.” But the bigger issue occurs when the plastic begins to break up. Tiny plastic particles are eaten by small fish, large fish feed on smaller fish, and right up the food chain. Ultimately, humans end of ingesting miniscule pieces of the plastic we might have recycled.

Another travesty is bottled water. Other than the taste, there is no redeemable value in drinking bottle water. Tests have proven that many municipal water supplies provide cleaner and healthier drinking water. It takes energy to make the bottles (an oil-based product), drill for the water, pump it out of the ground, bottle it in the factory, and ship

or drive it to the distribution centers. Oil and coal are burned to provide the energy during the product cycle – all with an impact on global warming. And the sad thing is, only 25% of the bottles get recycled.

There are seven (7) number classifications for plastic. Actually, they are resin identifiers encased in a “triangle” somewhere on the item (usually the bottom). However, this does not mean the item is recyclable. You need to check your city/village/town waste disposal and recycle guidelines to determine which numbers will be picked up at the curb, or check “earth911.org” to determine where you might take the item. Check out the following link to learn more about the (7) resin identifiers, plastic composition, harmful additives, recycling, and goods to be purchased from recycled plastic: <http://www.thinkgreen.com/recycle-what-detail?sec=plastics&prod=resin-identification-code>

In closing, know what plastic items your trash hauler/recycler will take and what needs to be taken elsewhere. When you can, purchase plastic products made out of recycled materials. This information is clearly stated on the packaging label. Lastly, check out the environmental record of the company you're buying manufactured items from. Plastic isn't going away. I have 2 kayaks and a canoe in my garage – not to mention the laptop I'm currently typing on - all made from plastic. Purchase with disposal in mind - excessive plastic food packaging is unnecessary; use recyclable grocery bags; and consider using durable aluminum/glass alternatives to plastic when possible.

Climate Rally

By Karen Daigler

On February 17th, the SC Niagara Group traveled to Washington D.C. for the Forward on Climate Rally accompanied by members of SUNY UB's Environmental Fraternity and Occupy Buffalo, as well as other local activists. This climate rally has been deemed the largest in U.S. history with between 40,000 to 50,000 people estimated in attendance despite the frigid cold weather. While a key message of the rally was to urge President Obama to reject the Keystone XL Tar Sands Pipeline, other climate change issues were also brought to the forefront, such as New York's struggle to ban hydraulic fracking. Residents of New York were called on to join a special protest earlier that morning to demonstrate to Governor Cuomo their opposition to hydraulic fracking. They then marched on to the main rally at the Washington Monument, where protestors from all over the country had gathered. The event concluded with a march to the White House and the long drive back home to Buffalo. For many of those who joined us, this was the very first rally they had ever attended. It was encouraging to see so many enthusiastic newcomers and also to witness such a diverse group of environmental advocates joined together in solidarity for the future of our earth.

To An Unfracked Future

By Lynda Schneekloth

On February 19, Governor Cuomo officially stated that the administration would miss the February deadline for releasing the SGEIS and the regulations to give more time for the health effect study. This is a good thing and thanks to Governor Cuomo, DEC Commissioner Martens, and DOH Commissioner Shah are in order. At the same time, the message contained information from Commissioner Marten that DEC is willing to permit wells based on the SGEIS alone without waiting for the formal regulations. This is, of course, unbelievable! NYS has consistently said it will have the strictest drilling regulations in the country, so the willingness to give permits without *any* regulations defies logic. This development must not have been missed by the NYS Assembly that passed a bill by the vote of 95 - 40 to have a two year moratorium on fracking until the health consequences are better understood, not only from the review being commissioned by NYS, but also EPA and PA studies. Unfortunately, the Deputy Conference Leader of the NY Senate, Thomas Libous, announced to the media that the Assembly Bill was not even to be brought to the Senate Floor for a vote. So much for democratic action.

Locally, there is campaign lead by Food and Water Watch/WNY Drilling Defense to have Erie County pass anti-fracking legislation with a hearing on April 18 in Buffalo. To get involved in this campaign on one of the three committees - Promotion and Tabling, Lobbying and Media - get in touch with Rita Yelda (ryelda@fwwatch.org). Please help us to send a message to our legislators.

Announcements

Renewable Energy Week Press Conference Tuesday, April 16, 2013 at Dug's Dive on the Outer Harbor:

Professor Robert Howarth from Cornell will be one of our speakers at the Renewable Energy Week press conference scheduled in Buffalo. He is one of the authors of the proposal that how NYS could be powered by renewable energy completely (solar, wind and water power) by 2030.

Public Hearing on Hydrofracking Moratorium Thursday, April 18, 2013, 10am - 12 pm at the Old County Hall 4th Floor, 92 Franklin Street, Bflo:

Public Hearing on a proposal for a Fracking Moratorium in Erie County.

Showing of documentary "Bidder 70" Monday, April 22, 2013 (Earth Day) 9pm at Burning Books 420 Connecticut Street, Buffalo:

"Bidder 70" is a documentary film about Tim DeChristopher, an environmental activist who successfully derailed a federal oil and gas lease auction for public land in southern Utah 2008.

"Turn, Don't Burn" — Time for Renewable Energy Sunday, April 28, 2013, 2pm-5pm Singer Farms Naturals (6730 Lake Rd Newfane)

We invite YOU to be part of a human relay from the Somerset Coal Plant to the Windmill on the Farm. Solar Punch Band (solar powered instruments), talks on renewables, food! This could be the most fun and inspiring event you take part in this year!

Sierra Club Niagara Group Annual Dinner Monday, May 6, 2013, 5:45 pm Eagle House Restaurant 5578 Main Street, Williamsville:

All are invited to this VERY fun event where you are able to meet fellow Sierrans, Executive Committee members and award recipients. Dinner is Dutch treat and if you plan to attend, please e-mail or call Larry by April 26: sniderlarry50@yahoo.com and (716) 634-8715 and let him know your choice of entrée.

Nature Walk Saturday, May 18, 2013, 10 am - 12 pm at Beaver Meadow Audubon Center Nature Preserve:

Sierrans! Let's get outside after this long winter and enjoy one of our most beautiful natural areas. Please plan ahead to join us for an enjoyable tour of Beaver Meadow Audubon Center, a 324-acre nature preserve in North Java, NY. A knowledgeable staff member from the Audubon Center will lead our group on an ecology walk through diverse habitats which include many types of birds, reptiles, mammals, plants, and organisms. We will explore a forest ecosystem and open our eyes and ears to the beauty that surrounds us. In addition, we will learn how Beaver Meadow has reduced their energy consumption through the use of solar panels. Bring your lunch and join other Sierrans in a covered picnic shelter afterwards. There is a \$5.00 participation fee per person payable to the Beaver Meadow Audubon Center. Please RSVP by Saturday, May 11, to Vicky Southall (Phone: 585-219-4523). Additional program and tour information and directions will be sent to you at that time.

Environmental Education Science Fair Saturday, June 22, 2013, 10 am - 3 pm at the Buffalo Zoo:

Join us for this Party for the Planet, a showcase for student's Earth Day projects (photos, posters, essays, books, etc.) and teacher's environmental work in the classroom. Teachers will receive special recognition by local legislators in this event.

Volunteer Opportunities for SC Niagara Group Members HELP WITH TABLING NEEDED:

The Sierra Club Niagara Group has the opportunity to participate at varied events this year and is looking for volunteers to help "people the tables". Tabling is a wonderful form of "grassroots" communication - a way to meet the public, let them know that about our Niagara Group, and provide information about our local activism. It may involve such activities as handing out Sierra Club national and/or local information and help get some petitions signed. Short training sessions are available. Please send an email to sierraclubangela@gmail.com if you are interested in helping us out.

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