



April Environmental Updates

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Earth photographed by astronauts on Apollo 17, courtesy NASA.

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April 18, 2001 Washington, D. C. - The Bush administration, under fire from environmental organizations and foreign governments for recent anti-environment decisions, has now overruled business objections and upheld two Clinton administration regulations that Bush had suspended shortly after taking office. One is to restrict development on thousands of acres of wetlands. The other will require thousands of manufacturers to publicly disclose lead emissions totaling 100 pounds a year from industrial production, including makers of batteries, circuit boards and pipe organs. That is one-tenth the current amount allowed of 10,000 pounds of lead emissions.

Jeff Wise, Policy Director of the National Environmental Trust, commented about Bush upholding the regulations, "The bar can't be much lower for Bush when he makes a big deal out of the fact that he is not going to block a Clinton administration rule to require polluters to report on the amount of lead they put into the environment."

In March, Bush dismayed environmentalists and foreign governments when he:

- Blocked tighter limits on arsenic in drinking water;
- Suspended cleanup requirements for mining companies;
- Abandoned U. S. participation in the Kyoto global-warming treaty;
- Renounced a campaign promise to restrict carbon-dioxide emissions from utilities.

First CDC National Study of Environmental Toxins

The lead decision comes at the same time that the U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported about its first national study of 5,000 men, women and children. The results show that traces of toxic metals, pesticides and plastics are in the blood and urine of most Americans. CDC found that women of child-bearing age are frequently exposed to phthalate, a chemical used in plastics and cosmetics. Phthalate can cause birth defects and reproductive problems in mice.

John Balbus, Director of the Center for Risk Science and Public Health said,

"This report should serve as a wake-up call. It is the first time the government has made an inquiry into the level of contaminants in human bodies, and the public has the right to know this."

Foreign Reaction to Bush Retreat from Kyoto Global Climate Accord

The Prime Minister of Norway, Jens Stoltenberg, told NRK public radio that Norway and other nations would now have to cut back their efforts to combat global warming by reducing carbon-dioxide emissions. The problem is the U. S. refusal to join the global climate accord effort. Stoltenberg said, "It's clear (U.S. refusal) will brake work over the whole world, so it's important to get the Americans along."

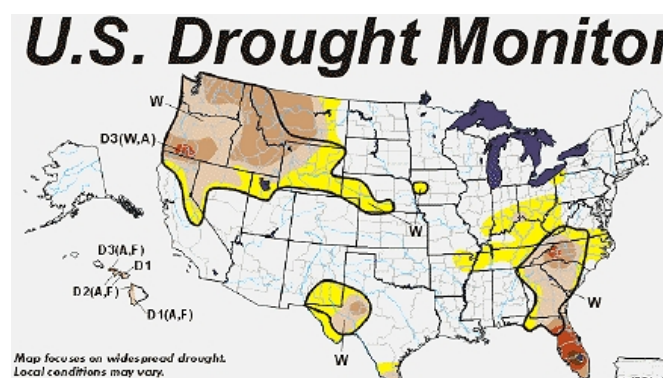
Stoltenberg is now criticized for using the Bush withdrawal from Kyoto as an excuse to change Norway's earlier commitment not to raise emissions of greenhouse gases by more than 1% between 1990 and 2012. The European Union has already said it will go ahead with Kyoto goals of cutting CO2 emissions without Washington support. But Norway is not a member of the EU and is the top non-OPEC oil exporter, a fuel that is a large contributor to greenhouse emissions.

More Evidence of Human Influence on Global Warming

Ironically, as the U. S. withdrew from participating in the Kyoto global warming accord and Norway appeared to back off as well, the April 12, 2001 issue of the journal Science contained two new studies that provide the strongest evidence yet that greenhouse gases are causing the Earth's oceans to warm. One of the studies was headed by Sydney Levitus of the Commerce Department's National Oceanographic Data Center. The other lead author was Tim Barnett of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography whose research was funded by the National Science Foundation.

Their new studies used computer climate models which showed that the warming of the oceans that has been measured over the last fifty years is precisely what would be expected from the additional greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere. Dr. Levitus said, "I believe our results represent the strongest evidence to date that the Earth's climate system is responding to human-induced forcing." Dr. Barnett added, "This will make it much harder for naysayers to dismiss predictions from climate models."

Droughts and Floods At Same Time in U. S.



Other computer model projections of global warming show more severe swings in temperatures and rainfall. Perhaps one example now are the severe droughts in the northwest U. S. and Vancouver, Canada along with Florida which is suffering the worst drought in 106 years of weather records. Oregon officials in

Klamath, Jackson and Josephine Counties say they are getting ready for the worst drought conditions in years. Bruce Sund, the Watermaster of Josephine County, says wells in rural areas are drying up and residents will have to begin trucking water soon. The Great Lakes are at all time lows and expected to get lower.

Mississippi River Crested Near Historic Highs



The Mississippi River crested April 25 at 22.29 feet continuing to flood surrounding land and tributaries as shown in the dark blue of this NOAA OSEI satellite image. Intense sandbagging efforts in Davenport, Iowa helped reduce water damage in the only river town without a flood wall. Photograph courtesy of NOAA.

Violent tornadoes, heavy snowfall and more flooding assaulted the Midwest again this past weekend. One person was killed when an F-4 tornado with wind speeds between 207-260 mph cut a path three-eighths of a mile wide and five miles long through Hoisington, Kansas shortly after 9 p.m. on April 21st. A quarter of the town's buildings were smashed and 26 residents were injured.

At the same time, the Mississippi River in the Midwest is flooding four states and provoked Governors in South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan to declare states of emergency for areas along the great river spilling over its banks. NOAA's Climate Prediction Center is predicting heavy rain and flooding between April 20-24 in much of western South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan. Also, strong to severe thunderstorms are forecast through much of the central Plains and Ohio River Valley for April 21-24.

Radioactive Ground Water in Fallon, Nevada

A 1994 U. S. Geological Survey analysis of 73 wells in the Fallon, Nevada area showed that 31 of the wells exceeded federal standards for radioactive minerals, mostly from naturally occurring uranium in the water. But no one bothered to inform the public. In fact, Assemblywoman Marcia deBraga (D-Fallon) did not learn about the report until April 17 and is outraged. She and other officials have been concerned about a cluster of 12 childhood leukemia cases diagnosed in Fallon since 1999.

"This could turn out to be significant in terms of the leukemia cluster," she said. "Clearly, radiation is one of the listed causes of leukemia. The researchers need to follow up on the radiation levels in the wells."

Websites:

<http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories/s625.htm>

<http://enso.unl.edu/monitor/monitor.html>

<http://www.nasa.gov/>

<http://www.noaa.gov/>

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