

Environment

Citizens Win Shutdown of Kirtland AFB Open Burning; Now Challenge Open Detonations and Perchlorate Contamination in Albuquerque's Groundwater

by Dave McCoy
October 16, 2009

Protect Air and Water (PAW), Albuquerque and Santa Fe environmental organizations and over a thousand petitioners shared a victory with the New Mexico Environment Department in halting the annual open burning of 80,000 pounds hazardous waste at Kirtland Air Force Base. Supporters to end open burning and detonation included many health care workers and residents living near Kirtland AFB.

Citizen concerns still remain high for the Open Detonation unit that will explode up to 100,000 pounds of hazardous waste a year. Citizen Action New Mexico, Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping (CARD) and Registered Geologist Robert Gilkeson requested by letter that Secretary Ron Curry of the New Mexico Environment Department make efforts to:

- * stop the ongoing detonation of hazardous waste;
- * install groundwater monitoring wells, and;
- * clean up toxic wastes such as perchlorate and heavy metals.

Open detonation practices at the Kirtland AFB Explosive Ordinance Depot have much more impact on Albuquerque's air quality than open burning. The list of dangerous chemicals and heavy metals that are exploded into the air that Albuquerque breathes fill six pages.

The largest source of the toxic waste for open detonation is tens of thousands of pounds of rocket motors sent to Kirtland AFB from Sandia Labs.

The disposal of rocket motors and ammunition has led to widespread contamination of groundwater by perchlorates at Kirtland AFB and other military installations in New Mexico and 21 other states. Drinking water for millions of people has been contaminated by perchlorate.

A 2005 National Academies of Science report reveals that perchlorates are



roughly ten times more toxic to humans than the Department of Defense has been claiming. Perchlorate can inhibit thyroid function, cause birth defects and lower IQs. They are considered particularly dangerous to children. 97% of breast milk samples taken randomly from around the U.S. have tested positive for perchlorates.

A letter from Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry to the Environmental Protection Agency describes perchlorate found at Kirtland AFB and Sandia Labs as seeping into Albuquerque's city municipal drinking water wells. Secretary Curry stated, Continued continued "Data collected in 2008 showed perchlorate in the School House Mesa Well. Yet very little groundwater monitoring data has been obtained for perchlorate at Kirtland."

The only monitoring well at the Explosive Ordinance site is the School House Mesa Well.

According to Robert Gilkeson, a Registered Geologist and hydrogeologist, "A minimum of three downgradient monitoring wells and one background monitoring well are required to be installed at the range under the Hazardous Waste Act. The groundwater monitoring at the Kirtland AFB open detonation range is completely unreliable for water sampling as is true for numerous groundwater monitoring wells at Kirtland AFB, Sandia Labs and Los Alamos National Laboratories."

Mr. Gilkeson adds that although the School House Mesa Well is... Page 2

Boom or Bust: Passing Gas In Mora County

By Fiona Sinclair

As our cities partake in green vision quests, dreaming a carbon neutral future, rural New Mexicans tremble at the possibility that this beautiful landscape will be gutted and poisoned by the pipelines, access roads, flare-stacks and toxic holding ponds wrought by a natural gas boom carried on in the name of climate change.

With the Federal Administration pushing natural gas cars and "energy options" as stepping stones to reducing CO2 emissions on target with a new global deal, those of us sitting atop "Split Estates" are experiencing how the agenda of global corporations takes precedence over community concerns like the future of our land base and our water; not to mention our overall quality of life.

The Emperor's New Clothes

At the end of the year the world meets in Copenhagen to hash out a new climate agreement to supersede the Kyoto Protocol. Kyoto should have driven global emissions down to 1990 levels, but without the participation of the USA — which produced approximately 25% of the world's carbon emissions until recently overtaken by China — Kyoto was bound to fail. Copenhagen is a different story in one respect at least: the Obama Administration is on board. Having said that:

The "emission impossible" task on the table this time around has the politicians promoting alternative energy, BUT — alongside "renewables" such as natural gas, nuclear (fission) power and "clean" coal. The drive behind the current push to buy-up sub-surface mineral rights is directly connected to this agenda. Talk about the emperor's new clothes.

So What's a "Split Estate"? This simply means that many land owners own only the surface of their land; not what's under the surface. With 80% of land ownership falling into the Split Estate category many folk are finding that the sub-surface rights under their land—the dominant estate— Page 3

Groundwater contamination...

detecting perchlorate, the monitoring well is unreliable for detecting just how much perchlorate and other other contaminants are in the groundwater. He says a new monitoring well should be installed at the location of the School House Mesa Well at the same time that the old well is plugged and abandoned.

Mr. Gilkeson says, "The continuing explosions create craters that continuously fracture the ground. The craters are a collection point for rainfall to carry the poisonous soil contaminants into the shallow groundwater. The strongly sloping topography predicts that the groundwater flow is to the west toward the Rio Grande River. There is no groundwater monitoring well to the west of the explosion crater. The only monitoring well, the School House Mesa Well, is cross-gradient 3/4 of a mile away to the north."

Repeated open detonations over decades on the same contaminated tract of land at Kirtland AFB cause the re-suspension of accumulated soil contamination into Albuquerque's air pathway.

The open detonations release other poisons to soil and air such as organic solvents, Hexavalent Chromium (Erin Brokovich), Arsenic, Lead, Mercury, Beryllium, Barium, Chromium, Selenium and radionuclides that are known to cause cancer, respiratory diseases, brain damage and fetal injury.

* Open detonations cause higher carbon monoxide emissions when Albuquerque already exceeds carbon monoxide limits under the Clean Air Act.

* The annual amount of particulate matter from open detonation is 20 times greater than for open burning;

* Nitrogen dioxide from open detonation is more than ten times greater than open burning.

* Open detonation for hydrogen sulfide is at the maximum allowable amount by New Mexico's ambient air standard.

Contact: Dave McCoy, Director

Obama administration moving forward on oil shale development on public lands



Published by Matt Wilkerson, October 21st, 2009

As further proof that the Obama administration is serious about tackling climate change kissing up to big oil, the Dept of Interior announced today that it would go ahead with a second round of federal oil shale leases. While most news outlets focused on the DoI scrutinizing royalties for shale oil, the real news is that the Obama administration is opening up our public lands to destructive oil extraction. "With this new round of [research, development, and demonstration] leases, we hope to move closer to responsibly and sustainably developing our oil shale resources," said Interior Secretary Ken

Salazar.

Of course there is nothing responsible or sustainable about oil shale. The process of extracting oil shale is similar to tar sands. The land is strip mined, then the oil is baked out of the rock by heating it to high temperatures. This is a process that destroys the land, uses massive amounts of water (most US oil shale is in arid climates), and uses massive amounts of energy. If tar sands are any indicator, it may take as much as 1 barrel of oil to extract two barrels of oil, greatly boosting the carbon footprint of shale oil.

While oil shale is still in the research and development phase, and oil companies have yet to find an economical way

to extract it, we must take it seriously. Not only is shale oil a global warming time bomb (potential recoverable reserves estimated as high as 800 billion barrels), we would witness the wholesale destruction of our public lands due to strip mining. The majority of oil shale reserves are found on public lands which have remained largely untouched by development. If oil shale gains a foothold we may very well be facing the same atrocious environmental crimes committed in the Alberta tar sands on our home turf.

[www. itsgettinghotinhere.org/author/mattwilkerson](http://www.itsgettinghotinhere.org/author/mattwilkerson)
 Dispatches from the Youth Climate Movement

New German Leadership Wants U.S. Nukes Out

Friday, Oct. 23, 2009

A policy document prepared by Germany's new governing coalition calls for the United States to withdraw its nuclear weapons from its European ally, Agence France-Presse reported yesterday (see GSN, April 13). The coalition, which includes Chancellor Angela Merkel's right-of-center Christian Democrats and the Free Democrats, said in their new common program that Germany would back U.S. President Barack Obama's global disarmament efforts

(see GSN, Sept. 23). "We will ask the (Atlantic) Alliance and our American allies to withdraw American nuclear weapons from Germany," said the document. Between 10 and 20 U.S. nuclear weapons are thought to be located underground in Buchel, in southwest Germany. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States removed most of its nuclear arms from Europe, though there are still some nuclear gravity bombs scattered across Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and

Turkey (see GSN, Oct. 16). Approximately 130 nuclear weapons were withdrawn in 2004 from the German Ramstein air base in Rhineland-Palatinate (Agence France-Presse/Khaleej Times, Oct. 22). Global Security Newswire by National Journal Group Daily news on nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, terrorism and related issues.
[www. globalsecuritynewswire.org](http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org)

French Radioactive Waste to Double by 2030

Date: 01-Jul-09

Country: FRANCE

Author: Mathilde Cru, Reuters

PARIS - France's highly radioactive waste will more than double by 2030 mainly as spent fuel derived from nuclear reactors mounts up, the French national radioactive waste management agency (Andra) said on Tuesday. Andra draws up every three years an inventory of sites polluted with radioactivity and details quantities per waste category as well as volume forecasts.

In 2007, high level waste, the most dangerous category, accounted for 95 percent of French waste radioactivity but only 0.2 percent in volume, it said in the inventory report. A complicated scale lists a wide range of different intensities of radioactive waste. High level waste will rise by 120 percent to 5,060 cubic meters by 2030 out of a total of 2.2 million cubic meters, the Andra report said. The 2.2 million cubic meters itself is twice the 2007 level.

"The agency is taking this figure into account for the design and management of its storage centers," Andra said in a statement.

It takes hundreds of thousands of years for spent nuclear fuel to become non-radioactive and its storage is becoming a crucial issue as new nuclear reactors are due to come online in coming years. France has not found permanent underground storage with the capacity to hold the nuclear energy waste already generated and the waste it will generate in the future.

The highly radioactive waste generated so far is stored in above ground facilities at nuclear reactor supplier Areva's fuel reprocessing plant in La Hague on the northwestern coast of Normandy.

Under French law, Areva, will have to bury the waste in a permanent repository by 2025.



Mora County continued...

are being bought up by prospectors and sold to oil and gas companies. Under the Takings Law a gas rig can be set up 100 feet from your house, use enormous amounts of water and routinely inject "non-proprietary fluids" into the ground. This undisclosed cocktail of chemicals is not only exempt from the Clean Air and Clean Drinking Water Acts, but ends up in surface ponds (some lined, some not), contaminates wells, causes severe health problems, can poison cattle, deplete the water table, and generally ruin the integrity of all life in the area.

Given the enormity of the problem humanity currently faces as atmospheric carbon levels rise, it is understandable that the primary decision makers — government and business officials, intellectuals — should rally to pull out all the stops and put every energy option on the table. But it doesn't make sense, by any meaning of the word, to consider short term profits at the expense of the environment; especially given the fact that we have renewable technologies that achieve the same result without harming the environment or the lives of people who depend on this fragile land base for survival.

Unfortunately, short sighted decision making at the federal level filters down to the local. In Mora County Shell Oil recently submitted a re-write of the county Land Use Plan removing references to historic agricultural practices in favor of drilling and development. Meanwhile, protests submitted by hundreds of county residents fall on deaf ears as a new county court house rises into the sky. At 55,000 square feet this Anti-Christ of Green is roomy enough for every county resident and their milk goat with room to spare. This is a heavy weight for future generations to bear, yet a weight that Shell Oil bears lightly as it rides the wave of global demise to bring hope in the form of a dark angel swinging her sword of destruction so the

county can pay its dues on time.

Some Better Ideas

These are critical times, with critical decisions to be made. Yet some very bad decisions are already on the table, primarily influenced by the lure of money and power. Instead, we need holistic actions which consider the bigger picture without compromising the integrity of the land. These include feed-in tariffs from household solar arrays, mini-hydro, geothermal and local small scale wind technologies, alongside a decision making process that encourages local food production, efficient building practices and less consumption; all this coupled with the promotion of local markets. Such a long term perspective not only creates a sounder economy for poor rural communities, but empowers folk with the tools and consciousness to move forward into a world where decisions are made for the benefit of all instead of a few corporate hogs vying to squeeze the last drop of profit from an already compromised earth.

I encourage those of you comfortable with the easy flick of a thermostat to think twice about where your energy comes from. Natural gas is pretty clean and convenient at the user (our) end, but at the production end it's creating a host of problems; not only for those of us busy preparing your top soil, but also in our underground water as it makes its way to your lips and your shower.

This is not a boom or bust issue. The intricate web of life requires that we consider multiple solutions that protect the environment and address equality while promoting economic vitality and restraining abuse. Given our planetary odds right now it's about the best shot we have.

Dr. Fiona Sinclair is a community activist who lives off the grid in Mora, NM, where she produces zero net emissions and a near zero waste footprint. To schedule talks, projections, workshops, video showings or ask questions, email rungumption@yahoo.com

In 2007, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) looked



Glenn Shankle was named executive director in July 2004. In this role, he manages the day-to-day operations of the state's primary environmental agency. The TCEQ has broad responsibilities dealing with air quality and water quality, water supply, and waste management.

into the geology of the Andrews hazardous waste site when the landowner, Waste Control Specialists (WCS), applied for a permit to build a radioactive waste dump. The technical staff of the com-

mission unanimously opposed granting WCS the permit. Overruling his staff, then-TCEQ Executive Director Glenn Shankle approved the permit. Shankle today works as a lobbyist for WCS.

<http://www.indypendent.org/2009/06/05/hudson-contaminates/>

Hudson Contaminates Go to Texas

By Mike Burke

From the June 5, 2009 issue | Posted in Local , Mike Burke | Email this article

DIRTY WATER: General Electric is finally dredging up PCB soil contamination in the Hudson River after decades of releasing manufacturing by-products into the river. The toxic soil will be dried and shipped to a Texas landfill by rail.

Peggy Pryor has never seen the Hudson River. For the past 56 years she has lived 2,000 miles away in the west Texas town of Andrews, on the New Mexico border. Soon, however, part of the Hudson River will be arriving in her town in the form of PCB-contaminated soil dredged by General Electric from the riverbed.

In the coming weeks, an 81-car train filled with dried PCB-contaminated sediment is expected to leave New York bound for a hazardous waste dump in Andrews. The route has not been released by GE. Trains filled with waste will continue to arrive in Andrews for the next six years as GE undertakes one of the nation's largest environmental cleanup projects. Between 1947 and 1977, GE dis-

charged an estimated 1.3 million pounds of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) into the river.

The Hudson River cleanup plan, which took years to develop and has been approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), has alarmed Pryor and several environmental groups in Texas.

"If you got a problem, solve it in your own town," Pryor said. "Don't create another one by bringing it here. It is crazy. You are just contaminating another place. We have enough oil contamination down here." Neil Carman, a chemist with the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club, has questioned the EPA's plan and the safety of shipping the waste to Texas by rail.

"Obviously this material needs to be removed from the Hudson River, but the alternative treatment technologies are very effective today and there is no reason in the world that General Electric should be transporting all of this material 2,000 miles," Carman said. "They should be treating it up there."

The EPA considered such alternative treatment technologies, but in 2002 the agency opted for the plan to dispose of the contaminated waste at a landfill in part because of the projected costs.

"Treatment technologies such as thermal desorption were technically feasible, but would cost substantially more than off-site disposal," said Kristen Skopeck, EPA public affairs specialist in Hudson Falls, N.Y.

New York environmentalists have been campaigning since the 1970s to force GE to clean up the Hudson, especially around Hudson Falls and Fort Edward, N.Y., the site of two large GE manufacturing plants. In 1984 the EPA declared a 200-mile stretch of the river to be a Superfund site — a designation given to the nation's most toxic sites. Due to years of challenges and delays, dredging did not begin until May 15.

Manna Jo Greene, environmental director for Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, said she shares many of the concerns raised by the Sierra Club in Texas. In 2001, Clearwater organization, in its official public comment on the cleanup urged the EPA to consider options besides sending the waste to a landfill.

Clearwater, however, views the start of the dredging of the Hudson as a major victory over General Electric. "It is essential the PCBs be taken out of the river system and be contained," Greene said.

But Pryor and Carman are concerned that, once in Texas, the PCBs may end up in another body of water: the Ogallala aquifer, the largest aquifer in North America.

In 2007, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) looked into the geology of the Andrews hazardous waste site when the landowner, Waste Control Specialists (WCS), applied for a permit to build a radioactive waste dump. The technical staff of the commission unanimously opposed granting WCS the permit. Overruling his staff, then-TCEQ Executive Director Glenn Shankle approved the permit. Shankle today works as a lobbyist for WCS.

"The site was unsuitable as a radioactive waste disposal facility primarily because of the poor geology," said Glen Lewis, who was one of three members of the TCEQ to resign in protest after Shankle issued the permit. "This proposed site is where one edge of the Ogallala pinches out. It is at the edge of the aquifer, but geologically considered to be over the aquifer."

Neil Carman at the Sierra Club says radioactive or PCB contamination of the aquifer could have disastrous consequences.

General Electric defended the Andrews site when contacted by The Indypendent, noting that the EPA, U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers already use the facility.

As for Peggy Pryor, she feels the residents of Andrews are being taken advantage of. "I just don't think citizens here are aware of what PCBs are," Pryor said. "If they can resolve this there at GE, why aren't they doing it? Why bring it here? The people there know what they are doing, it is the reason they want to bring it here."



CLEARING THE WATER: The Hudson River Sloop Clearwater is one of the local environmental groups that fought for decades to force General Electric to clean up the Hudson River.

<http://www.clearwater.org>
Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, Inc. is a 501(c)3 tax exempt nonprofit, member-supported corporation whose mission is to preserve and protect the Hudson River.