



Collaborative on Health and the Environment eNewsletter - July 2010



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On Oil Spills and Making Mistakes

In a recent interview regarding the BP oil disaster, Bill McKibben pointed out that even if all the oil had reached its intended destination-i.e., your corner gas station-it still would be an ecological and human health catastrophe. It is only because of the acute and immediate impacts of this so-called "spill" (which hardly captures nature of the devastation) that we actually stop, at least for a moment, and consider the magnitude of the ways we humans persistently undermine the health of our home planet and thus, ourselves.

A colleague once said to me: "I don't mind making mistakes-that's how we get better at what we do; but I don't want to make the same mistakes; only new mistakes." The current oil calamity in the Gulf is another profoundly sad example of our proclivity to repeatedly make myopic mistakes. Though this situation may be considered the single largest environmental disaster in U.S. history, it is hardly an aberration-and it is hardly just an "environmental" disaster. Instead, the current oil spill only underscores how challenging it seems to be for us to make systemic changes for the benefit of all as well as why we should never forget that human health and environmental health are inherently inseparable.

Let's just look for a moment at the chemical dispersants being used. The National Academy of Sciences issued a report in 2005 entitled, "Oil Spill Dispersants: Efficacy and Effects", that suggested a research agenda (very similar, by the way, to the one NAS published in 1989 entitled, "Using Oil Dispersants at Sea") to answer many questions about these dispersants that still remain unanswered today, such as: Do dispersants in fact help degrade oil more quickly or actually slow the process of degradation? What is the toxicity (not just lethality) of these chemicals when mixed with oil to organisms over time? Add these unknowns to the fact that the infamous formaldehyde-infused trailers that were given to victims of the Katrina Hurricane have now been resurrected for use by oil spill workers and others impacted communities on the Gulf. (See Richard Denison's blogs for more details on these issues: <http://blogs.edf.org>.) And these are just a couple minor examples of our collective inertia, even when external forces (such as science-based recommendations and disastrous oil spills) are applied.

So how to we keep from making the same mistakes? Several ways that we can do so are by taking precautionary action based on what we already know from the best available science, prioritizing community-based research, and implementing and enforcing regulatory measures that are truly protective of the health of current and future generations.

To help us understand what those steps might look like, CHE is hosting two national partner calls in the next few weeks. Though the calls will be focused on the health effects of the current oil spill, the experts we have invited to speak will also address the broader questions and possible solutions we must consider to avoid continuing to catalyze similar calamities. The first to be held on Thursday, July 29th will highlight presentations made at the Institute of Medicine's recent meeting on the oil spill in the Gulf. The second to be held Thursday, August 12 will feature Wilma Subra, one of the foremost research scientists for low-income communities in the Gulf Coast. For more information on these upcoming calls, please see the [call page](#) on the CHE website.

With warm regards,
Elise Miller, MEd
CHE Director

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This essay is available on [CHE's blog](#) for comment and further discussion.

CHE Partnership Calls and Special Events

New CHE feature: CHE has begun podcasting Partnership and working group call recordings. Subscribe to the podcast at: <http://www.healthandenvironment.org/Calls.xml>

CHE Partnership call:

The Human Health Effects of the Gulf Coast Oil Spill: A Summary of the IOM Workshop

Thursday, July 29 at 1 PM PST / 4 PM EST

[RSVP for this call](#)

The Gulf oil spill is now being called the largest single environmental disaster in our nation's history. The impact on the gulf ecosystem is only beginning to be assessed. And what of potential impacts on human health? The Institute of Medicine recently convened a meeting on that topic, and we will hear from some of the leading participants in that meeting about known and suspected health implications of the spread of crude oil and of efforts to contain and clean it.

Featured speakers will include:

- **Linda Rosenstock, MD, MPH**, Dean, UCLA School of Public Health
- **Lynn Goldman, MD, MS, MPH**, Dean, George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services
- **Brenda Eskenzai, PhD**, Director, Center for Children's Environmental Health Research, UC Berkeley School of Public Health

The call will be moderated by Steve Heilig, CHE Director of Public Health and Education. It will last one hour and will be recorded for archival purposes.

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CHE Cafe call:

On the Ground in the Gulf Coast: A Conversation with Wilma Subra and Michael Lerner

Thursday, August 12 at 10 AM PST / 1 PM EST

[RSVP for this call](#)

Wilma Subra is one of the foremost resource scientists for low-income communities in the Gulf Coast. This MacArthur Prize winning chemist has dedicated her career to helping low income communities get the facts they need about their chemical exposures and the implications for their health. She has worked tirelessly since the BP oil disaster to help communities and disaster workers understand their exposures. This conversation will bring the CHE community up to date on her latest findings.

Michael Lerner will facilitate this call. He is Vice-Chair and co-founder of the Collaborative on Health and the Environment. He is also president of Commonweal, a health and environment institute in Bolinas, CA.

Special note:

To assist CHE in better evaluating and planning Partnership calls CHE will send out a short survey to all call participants after each call. If you participate in an upcoming CHE call, please look for the post-call survey, and help CHE plan for future teleconferences and events.

Special Event:

CHE Co-hosts Children First Symposium: Promoting Ecological Health for the Whole Child

October 1, 2010

Mission Bay Conference Center, University of California, San Francisco

Pediatric Integrative Medicine embraces a holistic, whole-child approach, specifically examining the context - the ecology - in which optimal health and wellness is promoted. This groundbreaking one-day symposium will highlight a range of interacting factors that influence child health and development, including nutrition, education, socio-economic status, exposures to toxic chemicals, and access to preventative health care. Hosted by CHE, The Whole Child Center and the UCSF Osher Center for Integrative Medicine. Registration is \$50, and includes continental breakfast and lunch. Seating is limited.

[Read more](#), including a complete symposium description, current agenda, full list of speakers and registration information.

Resources from recent CHE calls:

If you missed any of the following CHE calls, you may listen to MP3 recordings and find supporting materials at the following links:

- June 10, 2010 - [Nanotechnology: A New Chapter in Environmental Health Sciences](#)
- May 18, 2010 - [The President's Cancer Panel Report: "Reducing Environmental Cancer Risk: What We Can Do Now"](#)
- May 11, 2010 - [The Information Age and EMF/RF Illness](#)
- May 4, 2010 - [CHE Cafe call with Annie Leonard, *The Story of Stuff*](#)

And of course, you can always explore our [archived resources](#)

CHE Working and Regional Group Updates

Working Group Highlights:

CHE is proud to highlight each month new and exciting working group efforts, which continue to draw the link between health and the environment.

This month:

~ CHE-LDDI has been honored with an Autism Society of America "Autism Champion" award.

[Read more](#)

Stay in touch with CHE via Facebook and the CHE blog:

Visit CHE's blog at <http://ourhealthandenvironment.wordpress.com/>

CHE's [Facebook page](#)

CHE-Fertility

~ coordinated by Julia Varshavsky, CHE Program Associate,
julia@healthandenvironment.org

~ **Planned Parenthood® Green Choices fact sheets and Environmental Health Assessment Form:** Planned Parenthood Green Choices supports the creation of a sustainable world by providing the information patients and clinicians need to make choices for better health and a greener environment - for individuals, families, and communities.

[View fact sheets and assessment form](#)

~ **Environmental nurses hold first U.S. conference at the UM School of Nursing:**

For the first time, nurses from across the nation came together at a conference to address the relationship between health and the environment. The conference, held June 7-8 at the University of Maryland School of Nursing (UMSON), was co-sponsored by UMSON and the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environment (ANHE), a new organization that brings together nurses and nursing organizations to achieve environmental health goals.

[Read more](#)

Also see [EnviRN](#), a virtual resource for environmental health and nursing.

~ **The *Girl, Disrupted* report is now available in German: *Gestörte Weiblichkeit, produced by Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF)*:** As a reminder, *Girl, Disrupted* is a report on the Women's Reproductive Health and the Environment Workshop held in January 2008; specifically, the report is a lay summary of how endocrine (or hormone) disruptors impact female reproductive health at different stages of life.

[Download the report in German](#)

~ **Newly Updated CHE-Fertility Online Abstracts Library:** We are still seeking beta testers for the newly updated [CHE-Fertility Online Abstracts Library](#), a representative collection of the peer-reviewed scientific literature related to fertility, reproductive health and the environment. The library includes nontechnical summaries of scientific studies that link environmental exposures to infertility/reduced fertility in addition to other reproductive health problems such as preterm birth, hypospadias, endometriosis, low sperm count, premature ovarian failure, prostate cancer, and others. If you are willing to provide us with feedback about how useful and searchable it is, please email julia@healthandenvironment.org with your input.

CHE-LDDI

~ coordinated by Erika Hagensen, ehagensen@healthandenvironment.org and Elise Miller, CHE Director, elise@healthandenvironment.org

~ **ASA National Conference a Huge Success:** On July 8, 2010, the Learning and Developmental Disability Initiative, with the support of the John Merck Fund,

cosponsored the 2nd annual Science That Makes a Difference Annual Symposium at the Autism Society of America national conference. This year's symposium, titled "Exposures and Child Development: The Latest on Environmental Health Sciences, Developmental Disabilities, and Public Health Policy", examined the growing evidence between environmental toxicants and disability. This all-day symposium, led by key researchers in the field, examined a variety of topics from an environmental health overview by Ted Schettler, MD, MPH, to the specific relationships between environmental health and autism led by Martha Herbert, MD, PhD. Surichi Chandra, MD, led the afternoon with a discussion of the impact of environmental toxins on psychological and neurological health followed by case study of Texas from Ray Palmer, PhD, looking specifically at that state's environmental pollutants and prevalence of disability. Joseph Guth, PhD, JD, offered the latest information on existing policy and possible legislative remedies. Finally, Jeff Sells, JD, and Vernell Jessie concluded the session on a personal note by sharing their perspectives as participants in the Mind, Disrupted biomonitoring report. It was a full day of good information, great questions, and increased momentum for future discussions

~ **LDDI was one of six recipients of this year's Autism Society of America "Autism Champion" award.** The champions were honored on July 9th at the Autism Society's 41st National Conference in Dallas. The Learning and Developmental Disabilities Initiative (LDDI) was honored for being instrumental in creating awareness of the critical role of environmental factors in neurodevelopment and in galvanizing advocates to demand change in the way toxins are regulated. Elise Miller, MEd, director of the Collaborative on Health and the Environment (CHE), served as founding coordinator of LDDI, which is comprised of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA), National Association for the Dually Diagnosed (NADD) and Autism Society (ASA). The efforts of LDDI members have helped achieve what a few years ago people thought impossible: bringing the Toxic Substances Control Act up for a consideration in order to better protect public health and reduce environmental contributors to chronic diseases and disabilities, including autism. In our community, where for decades families have seen first-hand the impact of the environment on the health and well-being of their loved ones with autism, LDDI's inspiring efforts to educate a far wider range of constituencies about environmental health science and leverage chemical policy reform gives us hope that we can attain a healthier future for all our children, families and communities.

Dr. Ted Schettler, science director of the Collaborative on Health and the Environment and science advisor to LDDI, will accepted the award.

~ **Journal article published:** The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) Environmental Health Initiative has published another article in the June edition of the journal *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities* dealing with the impact of environmental contaminants commonly found in elementary and secondary schools. The impact of those contaminants on the special education population is the specific focus of the article: "Children's environmental health: The school environment." [Order the article from the journal website](#)

~ **Scientific and policy statements published:** An article based on LDDI's science consensus statement on exposures and disabilities and the policy recommendations based on that statement has been published in the Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability. Written by LDDI members and leaders Steven G. Gilbert, Elise Miller, Joyce Martin and Laura Abulafia, the article provides a brief overview of the scientific and policy statements, with an updated conclusion and recommendations. [Order the article from the journal website](#)

~ **Save the Date:** Research and Science Teleconference September 14th
The next teleconference in the Research and Science series from the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) will feature Dr. Isabelo Ribeiro speaking on "Cross-sectional Evaluation of Formaldehyde Levels of

Portable Classrooms (= 3 years old) and Traditional Classrooms-Georgia, 2009 Pilot Study." For more information please [visit AAIDD's website](#).

~ **AAIDD will be hosting a new teleconference series on aging, environmental health, and disability in the Fall.** Guest speakers featured include Ted Schettler from Science and Environmental Health Network (SEHN), Maria Valenti from Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), and many more. This is a groundbreaking series and all are welcome to join, free of cost, with sponsorship provided by the John Merck Fund. More information will be posted on the [AAIDD EHI website](#) soon, or contact Laura Abulafia at laura@aaidd.org.

~ **LDDI Presentation at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association Schools 2010 Conference:** Laura Abulafia, director of education and outreach for AAIDD, will be speaking this Friday, July 16th, in Las Vegas on the topic of Environmental Toxic Exposures and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. This builds on LDDI's previous engagement with ASHA. [Visit the conference website](#)

~ **The CHE Mental Health Working group will be hosting a call on Friday, July 16, at 11 AM Pacific / 2 PM Eastern:** For more information, please contact Erika Hagensen, LDDI National Coordinator, at ehagensen@healthandenvironment.org. For dial-in information or to request to join the CHE Mental Health Working Group you can also contact info@healthandenvironment.org.

CHE Regional Working Groups Updates

CHE-HEAL

~ coordinated by Lisette van Vliet, lisette@env-health.org

~ **European health group supports call for reducing exposure to BPA:** A large group of European NGOs and scientists have written to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) calling for a reduction in human exposure to the synthetic chemical, Bisphenol A (BPA). The European Food Safety Authority produces scientific opinions for the European institutions for risk management decisions, policies and legislation. They also set the 'Tolerable Daily Intake' level for chemicals that come into food, for instance via plastic food contact materials.

The call to reduce exposure comes prior to the release of EFSA's official opinion on BPA. The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and over 40 international and national environment and health groups, and 19 scientists have welcomed the fact that the current EFSA review process will take into account a large number of studies in its opinion on BPA. The prior EFSA opinions were criticised as relying too heavily on a few studies with flawed designs.

The EFSA opinion on BPA has been postponed twice, now until September, to take into account "hundreds of studies" and the "most recent scientific literature". The Open Letter from scientists and NGOs says that they believe "any objective and comprehensive review of the scientific literature will lead to the conclusion that action is necessary to reduce the levels of BPA exposure, particularly in groups at highest risk, namely young infants and pregnant mothers."

Genon Jensen, Director of the Health and Environment Alliance, says a significantly revised opinion from EFSA would be very important for health protection. Some cancer groups in the UK and France are also calling for bans on BPA. Read HEAL's press release

The American Medical Association meeting: Health risk information needed for Gulf oil spill

The AMA will encourage water and air quality studies about areas affected by exposure to crude oil and will monitor the spill's environmental impact.

[Read more](#)

July 2010 issue of Environmental Health Perspectives available online

[Read more](#)

July 2010 issue of Environmental Factor available online

[Read more](#)

CHE maintains a [newsfeed](#) of environmental health related news announcements and events collected from a multitude of sources on CHE's website.

Reports, Resources and Other Updates

New CHE resource on chemical policy reform

CHE has created a new webpage with information on upcoming teleconferences, legislation and analysis; the initial focus will be on the "Safe Chemicals Act of 2010."

[Visit the webpage](#)

New Report: *What's That Smell?* from Women's Voices for the Earth

WVE released *What's That Smell? How the Pine Forest in Your Cleaning Product May be Hazardous to Your Health*, linking hidden fragrance chemicals in cleaning products to potential health impacts ranging from eye and skin irritation and breathing problems to hormone disruption and reproductive and developmental problems, particularly highlighting the impacts on women.

[Read the report](#)

New report: *Advancing Green Chemistry in Oregon*

This report is the outcome of a six-month study by the Oregon Green Chemistry Advisory Group, which was convened by the Oregon Environmental Council and is comprised of leaders from industry, academia, public agencies and non-governmental organizations.

[Read the report](#)

New report: *Nanotechnology: Nanomaterials Are Widely Used in Commerce, but EPA Faces Challenges in Regulating Risk*

[Read the report](#)

CHE lists hundred of reports, books, videos, databases and other resources in a searchable [Portal to Science](#) on CHE's website.

Thank you for taking the time to read the latest about CHE. As always, we welcome your questions and suggestions. Please direct comments to Elise Miller, Director of CHE, at elise@healthandenvironment.org.

Best wishes,

Elise Miller, MEd, Director

Steve Heilig, Director of Public Health and Education at San Francisco Medical Society and CHE

Erika Sanders, Administrative Coordinator

Julia Varshavsky, Program Associate

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