

# AFFEW NEWSLETTER

April 1997

## ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE ISSUE



Earth day is coming up again, that time when we think about the good old planet, and all the abuse that it puts up with. The way we humans treat it, the earth should be somewhat upset at us, and give us a few melted icecaps or earthquakes to think about. Fortunately, it's been fairly tolerant, maybe because it knows that the fearless AFFEW group is doing what it can.

I was starting to tell an acquaintance about household hazardous waste, when he interrupted to let me know that I was overstepping my bounds. Sure, he had a weight problem, and maybe his waist did get in the way now and then, but to call it hazardous was going too far. Instead, he felt that the truly hazardous waist in the neighborhood belonged to the lady who did some part time bikini modelling. Her waist would attract his attention now and then, at which times his wife was likely to do him great damage. I guess even hazards are relative.

### EVENTS

Pat Willick has been the patron saintess of Cartier Park cleanups for the past couple of years. She and her husband Stub managed to take truckloads of junk out of there, but they're competing with some who seem to feel that trash should be a part of the landscape. This year's CP Cleanup will happen on EARTH DAY (the 22nd) at 10AM. All dedicated earthlings show up at the dirt parking lot near the north end of Rath Avenue. Go to the end of the road and turn left on dirt. It's there.

**Adopt-A-Highway** will de-trash the usual two miles of US 31. The dates are probably as follows: from April 26 to May 4, from July 12 to July 20, and from September 20 to September 28. This year, call Julie at 845-0053 to find out details.

There will be a full moon on **Earth Day** this year. We could all go out and howl at it, reverently of course, for a celebration, but if we plan to do this, there will be clouds for sure. Let's try again to do a canoe trip starting at the Hamlin Lake boat launch in the State Park. Last time, it turned cold and windy, so we took a hike instead, and that wasn't all bad. Figure on meeting at the launch ramp about 5 PM. We'll be able to bring two canoes and paddles. If you have life jackets, bring them. If you want to use one of our canoes call Dave at 843-1883 to be the first to reserve it. We'll leave the launch ramp area no later than 6 PM, and probably paddle or hike for an hour or so. You could even bring a lunch or snacks, but when we get back, some of us may go check out the burgers at the Grand Hotel. They use meatless buns and sugar-free beef. Great health food.

Your fearless board of directors has decided to apply for a tax-free status for our organization so we'll be 501 (C)(3) as far as the IRS is concerned. Most organizations do this so that people will donate big bucks to them. We're doing it so we can sponsor such things as President Julie's outdoor teaching efforts. It seems that grants are available for such things, but most will only be given to 501(C)(3) organizations.

**Household Hazardous Waste** will be properly disposed of again this year. The date will be May 10. In many of the communities where this service is available, people usually have to pay quite a bit to get stuff taken off, but thanks to Dow, individuals don't have to bear the cost. AFFEW does collect donations at the site to help with their expenses in running the show and feeding donuts to Dow employees, but the big reward for us is to know that all of the awful stuff that's brought in will be eliminated as cleanly as is currently possible. As usual, you'll have to call for an appointment so that the lines don't get long at noon. Watch the Daily News for announcements regarding whom to call and when.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Maggie and Dan Blain did an amazing job of chipping Christmas Trees in spite of overwhelming odds. Very few volunteers showed up, and there were hundreds of trees. Dan said that the pile seemed endless, and by the time they'd chipped a million or so, a new pile had sprouted, grown, bloomed with tinsel and fallen over dead. Dan is going to apply for a Grinch license. We should get them both a big steak dinner, but rumor (a brand new, totally unfounded one) has it that Maggie's gone vegetarian, so that idea is out.

### THE ENVIRONMENT

The tendency of spring to arrive on July 3 certainly doesn't make us think much about global warming, but it might be that there is a connection. As the earth warms up, more energy is added to the atmosphere, which would tend to create more violent weather. Where we usually expect some storms around the equinoxes, both spring and fall, it seems lately like they've been getting a little worse. March is supposed to be the month that "comes in like a lion and out like a lamb," but this year that description seems to fit April. Could it be that the increasing atmospheric energy due to warming is pulling more cold air down from Canada? Nobody knows for sure, but it will be interesting to watch.

Julie has run into an issue that you may have seen in the paper lately, that of informing the public when something of a possibly hazardous nature is brought into the area. In this case it is the "sour gas" pipeline that is being built in the county. It got Julie's attention because it comes near her house.

There are several issues of interest here. First, there is apparently no need to notify people in the area of the pipeline if it is placed on private property, and the property owners give their approval. Aside from the question of whether the pipeline installers were truthful about the nature of the gas which is to be moved through the pipe, we see another example of trying to define the point where individual rights, or corporate rights, bump heads with public rights. It gets to be a philosopher's delight to argue whether people have the right to do anything they want with property they own. If it's okay to run a sour gas line through someone's land, is it okay to put in a nuclear fuel reprocessing plant if the owner wants it? What if the owner lives out of state? As the planet gets more crowded, we'll see more of this, largely because there isn't the space for hazardous things to be done way away from everyone.

Another issue, this one frequently brought up by the gas company, is that we, the public, want natural gas to heat homes. It's got to get to us from the well, and trucking it down the highway is a lot more dangerous than running it through a pipe. If we want gas, do we have the right to complain about the methods necessary to get it to us? Come to think of it, we *always* have the right to complain.

Most natural gas has some hydrogen sulfide with it when it comes out of the well. When there is enough of this impurity, the mixture is called sour gas. The hydrogen sulfide is much more toxic than the natural gas that is with it. Fortunately the percentage of hydrogen sulfide is very small; unfortunately this percentage is still deadly.

Some years ago the nuclear power industry got a black eye when a reactor malfunctioned at Three Mile Island in New York State. As far as I know, there was almost no radiation released to the atmosphere. Then Jane Fonda made a movie that implied that nuclear power was bad because it was so complex, and because the contractors who built the plants were shifty. Later, the Russians had their large problem with a reactor at Chernobyl, a reactor that was built along a design that is less safe than the ones used in the U.S. That failure did cost lives, and it remains to be seen if there will be long term side effects from the radioactive materials that the wind blew all over northern Europe. The anti-nuclear people will always bring up the problems of waste disposal when nuclear power is discussed.

It seems that there are no simple answers. The sour gas line endangers many people in that a rupture of the line could cause lethal levels of the gas to spread out between 3 to 6 miles from the site of a leak. There is also the problem of air contamination during routine operation of compressor plants and "sweetening" facilities. People and livestock claim to have been affected. The waste from burning fossil fuels consists of everything from carbon particles to sulfuric acid. In 1957, over 4000 people died in London due to a weather pattern that trapped the city's air pollution in the city. This all sounds a lot like the hype we hear about nuclear power.

I think we've gotten to the point where we'd better look at all aspects of our energy systems, and most of all, our energy use. In the old days, a windmill on the farm pumped water, and a stream ran a sawmill. Do we need to get to the point where a windmill by each house generates its electricity and runs its rechargeable cars? Do we need TV?

Do we need to make fossil fuels expensive enough to pay for the cleanups they necessitate?

Go hug a tree.

Dave Hall.

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