

Environmental Exchange

A publication of the Citizens' Environmental Coalition

October 2002
Newsletter &
Calendar

The Houston-Galveston area's most comprehensive listing of environmental activities and events.

Spraying for West Nile could do more harm than good

By Erika McDonald

While the spread of West Nile virus saturates local media coverage, little mention is made of the environmental and health impacts of the pesticides sprayed to combat infected mosquitoes. Around the country and here in Houston however, environmentalists objected to massive spraying campaigns like the ones in effect in Harris County.

Activists like Martin Reiner, executive director of Texans for Alternatives to Pesticides, contend that the media has inflated the seriousness of West Nile virus, which in reality, poses less of a health threat than the use of toxic pesticides. At press time, the Centers for Disease Control reported 68 confirmed cases of West Nile in Texas with two cases resulting in death. Health officials confirmed that the chance of dying from West Nile virus, once infected, is about one in 1,000.

According to Dr. Ray Parsons, director of Harris County Mosquito Control, pesticide spraying is a necessary response to a dangerous disease. The county uses resmethrin for ground spraying and dibrom for aerial spraying. Both pesticides were approved by the Environmental Protection Agency. They were sprayed at levels below the maximum allowable rate and only at night, Parson said.

Despite EPA approval, independent scientific studies, including one at Mt. Sinai Hospital, found that pyrethroids like resmethrin act as an endocrine disrupter by mimicking the effects of the female hormone estrogen. This can lead to reproductive dysfunction, developmental impairment, breast cancer in women and lowered sperm counts in men. Other studies linked pyrethroids to long-term neurological damage, thyroid damage, and childhood cancer.

In a report published in *Environmental Health Perspectives*, Toshio Narahashi, an international toxicology expert, said nervous system damage caused by pyrethroids is comparable to the effects of DDT.

Dibrom, used by Harris County for ground spraying, contains dichlorvos, an organophosphate that numerous studies have linked to brain and liver damage, breast cancer and childhood leukemia. The EPA considers organophosphates more acutely toxic than pyrethroids and is currently studying their effects. A comprehensive study on pyrethroids is scheduled for 2004. Meanwhile, dibrom

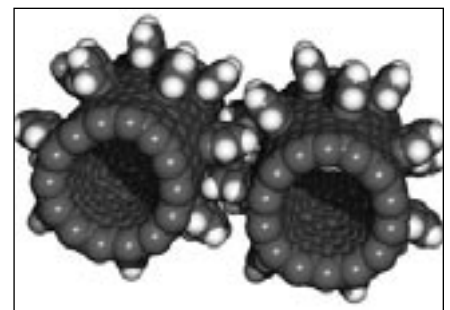


Photo by Ed Betz, Associated Press

Size Matters: Nanotechnology environmental friend or foe?

By Erika McDonald

Hailed by researchers as the next industrial revolution, nanotechnology opens up a world of possibilities, but some are warning against a potential dark side of this new frontier.



Nanogears no more than a nanometer (one billionth of a meter) wide could be used to construct a matter compiler, which could be fed raw material to arrange atoms and build a macro-scale structure. Photo courtesy NASA Ames.

Nanotechnology is the manipulation of matter with precise control at the atomic level and its proponents say it could lead to replicating food and water to end hunger, rebuilding the depleted ozone layer, curing cancer and other applications that seem to border on science fiction.

At the Center for Biological and Environmental Nanotechnology at Rice University, the research themes are more pragmatic: the basics of nanomaterials, medical application development, increasing production

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Environmental Exchange

The Environmental Exchange is published by the Citizens' Environmental Coalition (CEC), an information clearinghouse and communications network for environmental issues in the Houston/Galveston area.

The CEC mission is to improve the quality of life and health in the region through education, dialogue and collaboration.

CEC serves the general public by bringing many diverse groups together to build awareness and stimulate discussion about environmental issues in the region.

Programs include forums that give a balanced perspective on environmental issues, and information vehicles that enhance understanding.

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The Citizens Environmental Coalition



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Perspectives Behind closed doors: Toxic hazards inside and out

*By Nancy Moreno Associate Director,
Center for Educational Outreach Baylor
College of Medicine*

Local news reports frequently inform Houston residents about the levels of potential allergens, such as pollen or mold spores, or of dangerous pollutants, such as ozone. The amounts of these substances are measured at special outdoor collection points. But what about indoor pollution? How do we know if the air inside our homes and businesses is safe to breathe?

There is a growing consensus among experts that indoor air can be even more polluted and potentially more harmful than outdoor air. In addition, most people spend more time inside than outside, thus increasing the risks and duration of exposure to indoor pollutants. Because they are still growing, children are even more vulnerable to the effects of poor indoor air quality than adults. Even though we usually don't have measurements of pollutants inside our homes, we can take actions that will reduce the amounts of harmful substances in the air.

A variety of substances can cause indoor air to become unsafe. Some of these substances are chemicals that can be harmful to anyone. Examples include tobacco smoke, carbon monoxide from improperly vented heaters and fireplaces, pesticides, glues, paints and cleaners. Second-hand smoke, for example, was linked to increased risks of cancer and respiratory illnesses among non-smokers. Household chemicals such as pesticides, paint thinners or glues can cause health problems when safety instructions on the labels are not followed or if they are used in rooms that are poorly ventilated. Eliminating or restricting the use of these materials can reduce hazardous exposures.

Other indoor air pollutants only affect some people. In Houston, the damp climate and heavy rains create conditions that can be ideal for the growth of mold and mildew. Mold, that fuzzy black stuff that grows in dark, damp places, reproduces itself by releasing thousands of tiny spores. The spores

allow the mold to spread and can trigger allergic reactions in some people. Since there is no way to eliminate all mold and mold spores, the best way to limit mold growth indoors is by finding and eliminating any sources of moisture near plumbing, windows or inside walls.

Damp climates also are ideal for the growth of the dust mite – another tiny organism that can cause big allergy problems. Dust mites are microscopic animals that live inside bedding, pillows and mattresses. Too small to see without a microscope, dust mites survive by eating cast off flakes of skin from the human inhabitants of the same house. Waste and pieces of body parts from dust mites are powerful allergy triggers that have also been linked to asthma in children. Dust mites can be controlled by washing bedding frequently in hot water and by replacing feather pillows and comforters with polyester bedding. Another common Houston pest, the cockroach, is also known to produce waste that can trigger allergy and asthma attacks. Cockroaches are attracted to food waste, so keeping food preparation areas clean and covering all leftovers is an easy way to begin to discourage this common insect.

Even pets can contribute to the misery of allergy sufferers. Dander, or skin and hair flakes, can be present as dust in indoor spaces and contribute to air pollution.

Sometimes, the simplest solutions – opening a window to provide fresh air, changing the filters on an air conditioning system or fixing a plumbing leak – can provide the biggest benefits when it comes to improving the quality of indoor air.

For more information on the importance of indoor air quality visit The National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences at www.niehs.nih.gov.

Synergy 2002

Please join the CEC in our celebration of environmental excellence at the 2002 Synergy Awards on Tuesday, October 1. Enjoy this year's South American theme with tasty treats and lively music by the band Sur. The celebration will take place at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in the Medical Center. For tickets, contact Sarah Doss at 713-524-4232 or Issues@cechouston.org

Can recycling on the decline

by Pat Y. Spillman, Jr.

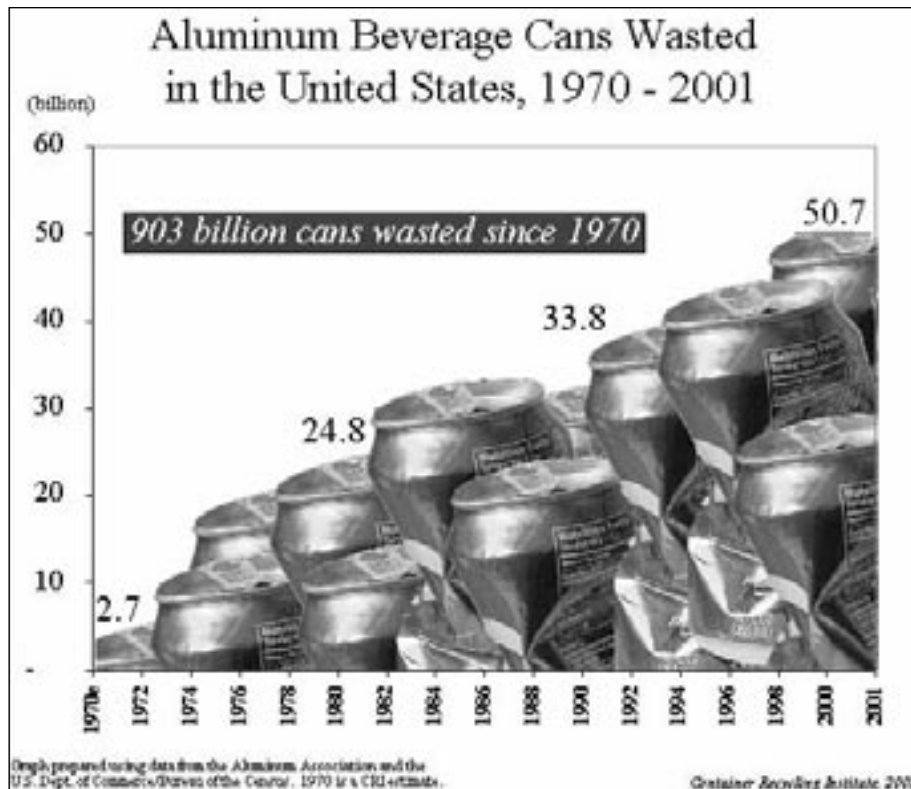
Less than one half of the 100 billion aluminum beverage cans sold in the U.S. last year were recycled, according to a July report released by the Container Recycling Institute. CRI, a non-profit research group that promotes recycling policies and practices, reported there are serious environmental impacts associated with the decline of can recycling.

The report, "Trashed Cans: The Global Environmental Impacts of Aluminum Can Wasting in America," found that the 50.7 billion cans thrown away by Americans last year amounted to 1.5 billion pounds of aluminum that ended up in landfills, incinerators or littered on the nation's streets and highways. CRI researchers said Americans wasted seven million tons of aluminum cans between 1990 and 2000, enough to make 316,000 Boeing 737 airplanes. Within two years, Americans will have wasted one trillion cans since the aluminum beverage can was introduced in the 1960s.

Each wasted can is replaced with one made from raw materials which requires nearly three times the energy and generates significantly more pollution than a can made from aluminum scrap. More than three million tons of greenhouse gases and 75,000 tons of sulfur and nitrogen oxides were emitted in the mining, refining, processing and smelting of virgin raw materials to replace the cans Americans wasted in 2001, according to the report. "Had the 50.7 billion cans wasted last year been recycled, they would have saved the energy equivalent of 16 million barrels of crude oil: enough energy to generate electricity for 2.7 million U.S. homes for a year," researchers wrote.

The report also attributes soil erosion, contamination of water supplies and habitat destruction from strip mining and flooding of forests beneath hydroelectric reservoirs (built to generate electricity for aluminum smelters) to primary aluminum production.

One cause of increased can wasting identified in the report is the rising trend in immediate consumption. Americans consume more beverages outside the home, away from the convenience of their residential curbside recycling bins.



Graph courtesy Container Recycling Institute.

The decline of the national recycling rate for aluminum beverage cans, which peaked at 65%, is due to declining financial incentives to recycle, according to the report. Aluminum scrap prices have risen relatively little in twenty years and, over time, manufacturers have made cans with less aluminum so it now takes 33 cans to make a pound versus 25 in 1980. These factors, along with the closing of many redemption centers in recent years, make collecting and redeeming cans less profitable than in the past.

To stem the tide of can wasting, the report calls for deposits on beverage containers, voluntarily imposed by the beverage industry or mandated by deposit laws. "The refundable deposit system is the only mechanism proven to recover beverage containers at rates that exceed 70%, and deposits of 10 cents result in recovery rates that exceed 90%," researchers wrote.

The report noted that the average redemption rate in deposit states is 78% versus 28% in non-deposit states. A report by Businesses and Environmentalists Allied for Recycling, cited by CRI, found that in 1999 the nine deposit states with 29% of the population accounted for half of all beverage containers recycled in the U.S. The CRI report also urged maintaining existing neighborhood recycling programs and increasing recycling opportunities in multifamily apartments,

commercial buildings and public places.

In Texas, container deposit legislation was introduced in previous legislatures, but died in the face of well-financed opposition from the beverage industry that favors voluntary recycling. On the national front, Senator Jim Jeffords recently introduced legislation requiring a ten-cent deposit on all recyclable beverage containers. A similar bill has been proposed in the House.

The report, written by CRI researcher Jennifer Gitlitz, is available through the CRI web site at www.container-recycling.org.

Resource Corner

Helpful hints for CEC member organizations

Virtual Volunteering

Is your organization making the most of the internet? The Virtual Volunteering Project compiles information and resources to help organizations find and involve volunteers using online technologies. Find out how you can reach out to new volunteers and manage existing volunteers in an effective, meaningful way via the web by visiting <http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/resources.html>.

West Nile

Continued from page 1

and resmethrin maintain approval status and widespread use.

Evidence from New York suggests that pesticides also pose a serious threat to wildlife. State wildlife pathologist Dr. Ward Stone reported that more birds were dying from pesticide poisoning than from West Nile virus. Based on a sample of 4,000 birds brought in for testing out of concern over the spreading virus, Ward found that 31 percent tested positive for West Nile while 48 percent died of pesticide poisoning. For many of the remaining birds, pesticide poisoning was a major contributing factor in their deaths, though not the immediate cause. Birds that were disoriented or sickened by pesticide died from crashing into buildings, being hit by cars or other similar trauma. Not all birds that tested positive for the virus actually died from it.

Environmentalists contend that, in addition to being toxic, pesticides are also ineffective. There is evidence that long-term spraying may actually increase the number of mosquitoes by destroying predators that feed on them. Mosquitoes that are sprayed but not killed by the poisons may become resistant and become more aggressive biters. Pesticides also kill beneficial insects that play an important role in maintaining ecological balance. In its 2001 report on West Nile, the CDC identified adulticide (spraying for adult mosquitoes) as the least efficient mosquito control technique.

According to Reiner, there are eco-friendly alternatives that are more effective than pesticide spraying. Alternatives include bat houses (bats are natural mosquito predators) and traps that attract mosquitoes by emitting carbon dioxide – the same thing that attracts them to people. Some environmentalists also consider biopesticides a good alternative because they generally affect only the target pest sparing the birds, mammals and beneficial insects harmed by broad-spectrum pesticides. They are also less toxic and decompose quickly, which results in less pollution than conventional pesticides.

Reiner said the best weapon against West Nile virus is personal responsibility. “If everyone would get rid of standing water around their own homes, that would accomplish so much more than spraying ever could,” he said.

While the EPA maintains that pesticides

like the ones used in Harris County are relatively safe, it does not recommend they be used as the sole weapon against mosquitoes. An Integrated Pest Management Program, touted by the EPA as the best way to protect communities from the West Nile virus, is an ecologically based, multi-faceted approach that includes use of pesticides only after systematic monitoring of pest populations indicates a need. IPM strategy relies heavily upon prevention tactics like eliminating standing water and using larvicides, which kill mosquito larvae.

Parsons said that Harris County does employ methods other than adulticide to combat mosquitoes. The county maintains a program of source reduction (eliminating mosquito breeding grounds), larvicides and neighborhood clean-ups. The county’s public education program includes an elementary school project called CATCH and presentations to community organizations. The county is currently working to develop a mosquito trap to be used for future campaigns. Parsons said the county uses pesticides responsibly and that a press conference is held before each spraying to ensure people know when and where pesticides will be used. He insisted that his office had not received any complaints about people becoming ill from pesticide exposure.

“The only (complaint) calls we’ve gotten are from anti-pesticide activists who don’t want us to use any pesticides at all,” he said. ●

Nanotechnology

Continued from page 1

and determining possible health and environmental impacts. According to Dr. Kevin Ausman, the center’s director, about one quarter of CBEN’s budget is spent on the latter.

He said that nanotechnology could provide the answer to current environmental problems. For example, designing filtration membranes for water purification and waste treatment at the molecular level means even the smallest impurities can be removed. Nanoparticles are also highly absorbent, Ausman said, suggesting that they could one day be used in the detection and clean-up of contaminants.

One organization, the Canada-based Erosion, Technology and Concentration Group is convinced that the implications of this quickly developing field are not as benign as proponents claim. In an eight-page report,

“No Small Matter! Nanotech Particles Penetrate Living Cells and Accumulate in Animal Organs,” authors said that, because of their small size, nanoparticles released into the environment would be nearly impossible to detect and remove. ETC researchers also warn that the effects of tiny man-made particles accumulating in the lungs or liver are unknown.

Ausman said that it is premature to worry about the release of nanomaterials into the environment because commercial applications of nanotechnology are still several years in the making. He said the first uses of nano-products will be in medicine. Because any new medical treatments must go through the Food and Drug Administration, Ausman said we will learn a great deal about the health impact of nanoparticles in general and have answers about specific nanoparticles from FDA protocols already in place.

The ETC report also identified the shape of carbon nanotubes, which their researchers said resemble asbestos fibers, as a potential danger.

Ausman said such concerns are based completely on speculation. He said tests are currently underway at NASA to determine whether carbon nanotubes can be inhaled and what effect they will have on the lungs. Two completed studies on mice and guinea pigs suggest it is unlikely the carbon fibers pose a risk to humans.

At the Earth Summit in Johannesburg in August, ETC Group appealed to world leaders to call for a moratorium on all nanotechnology until health and environmental risks are assessed.

Ausman said that halting nanotechnology development would be a mistake as it is necessary to produce more nanomaterials in order to properly study their effects.

“The study of environmental impact goes hand-in-hand with the development of the technology, each informing the other,” he said.

Later this month, the center will host a nanotechnology conference, during which, one session will address health and environmental issues. But if environmentalists are looking for definitive answers, Ausman warns, they have a long wait ahead of them.

“We’re dealing with a very broad class of materials, just because something is nano-sized doesn’t mean it will have a negative impact,” he said. “Some (kinds of particles) will and some won’t-it’s just too early to tell.” ●

CEC Notes

Grant writing workshop

CEC will host a grant writing workshop on October 8, from 1pm to 3 pm. Attendees will be trained by Anne Olson, President of the Buffalo Bayou Partnership. Olson will cover topics like what makes a winning proposal and how to write a stellar cover letter. The workshop will be held at 3015 Richmond. To register, contact Sarah Doss at 713.524.4232 or email at sarah@cechouston.org by October 7. The training fee is \$25.

Coalition Notes

Sierra Celebration

The Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club will hold its annual Sierra Celebration this year on October 19 and 20 at Selah, 5,500 acres of Texas hill country that have been restored to a working ranch. The ranch, once neglected, now features large areas of grassland, native trees, a man-made bat cave and a charming country store. Among the weekend activities will be a Saturday afternoon tour of Selah on the open-air trolley, information on grassland and habitat restoration, special guests and presentations and optional hikes to either Pedernales State Park or Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park. The event fee is \$49 which covers lodging, tours and meals. Lodging is bunkhouse style, with separate quarters for men and women. The registration deadline is October 9. To register, contact Jennifer Walker at the Sierra Club State Conservation Office at 512-477-1729 or e-mail to Lonestar.chapter@sierraclub.org.

EcoNotes

Rain forest future bleak

A leading Brazilian newspaper reported in September that if logging and burning in the Amazon rain forest persist at the current pace, the forest will be completely stripped in 200 years. Some experts say that the situation is even more serious, claiming the forest could disappear within 40 to 50 years.

According to Brazil's National Institute for Space Research, of the total four million square kilometers of Amazon rain forest, about 600,000 square kilometers are estimated

to have disappeared by the end of last year due to deforestation.



At the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, the World Bank and two environmental groups announced a plan to extend financial assistance toward the Brazilian government's initiative to protect 12 percent of the Amazon forest – the largest-ever tropical forest conservation plan.

Deforestation of the Amazon, which accounts for roughly 30 percent of the total rain forest on Earth, is attributed mainly to farmland development and commercial logging.

Towers threaten migratory birds

Three conservation organizations filed a petition in September with the Federal Communications Commission demanding a halt on all plans to construct new communications towers along the Gulf Coast, citing adverse impacts on migratory birds. The petitioners, which include The American Bird Conservancy, Forest Conservation Council and Friends of the Earth, claim the FCC violated the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act by using a loophole in environmental regulations to illegally authorize tower construction. They say no new towers should be built until an environmental impact statement that includes public participation procedures is completed. The Gulf Coast is recognized as a regional stopover for hundreds of species of migratory birds. The U.S Fish and Wildlife Services reported that close to 40 million of these birds, spanning 230 different species, die annually in collisions with the towers. They also estimated that, in the continued absence of environmental documentation or public oversight, 50,000 more towers will be built in the next decade. To support the tower campaign, visit www.abcbirds.org/policy/towers/tower_sign-up.htm.

Helping governments clean up their act

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality was selected by the Environmental Protection Agency as one of eight organizations around the country to become Local Resource Centers helping government agencies adopt environmental management systems.

Environmental management systems provide organizations with a structured process for identifying and reducing a broad range of environmental impacts from their operations. This comes as part of an EPA-led effort to encourage government agencies to adopt environmental management systems used more extensively by private industry. Each center will share information on its activities through a publicly available on-line national clearinghouse of environmental management system information for public agencies. This clearinghouse, which also provides more information about the centers and environmental management systems, is available at www.peccenter.net.

Free Park-ing

For the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, The Lone Star Legacy Weekend means serious business – raising money to support conservation and historical preservation. For everyone else, it means enjoying their favorite state parks for free. From October 19 to 20, the TPWD is waving entry fees for all state parks and participating fisheries, trails and wildlife management areas. Special weekend activities will include fishing contests, car shows, concerts, nature tours and living history demonstrations. Fees for overnight camping and certain activities will still apply. While entry is free, donations will be accepted to benefit the Lone Star Legacy Campaign. For more information visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

President's Letter

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and leaving all the non-product stuff right there in the store.

With the city running out of landfill space and the proposal of charging for "excess curbside refuse" I'm less inclined to pay twice for a product to be packaged and marketed to me.

October Calendar

For the most complete current listing of environmental happenings in the Houston-Galveston region, visit CEC's website at www.cechouston.org and click on Calendar.

Tue, Oct 1

Naturalist Certification Program – In the Great Circle – Human Ecology, Part 1
Where: Houston Arboretum
When: 7-9 pm
Contact: 713-681-8433
Fee: \$15 for members, \$20 for non-members

Sat, Oct 5

Galveston Bay Conservation & Preservation Association Fundraiser
Contact: 281-326-3343
Fee: Yes; Please call

Sat, Oct 5 & Sun, Oct 6

Texas Wildlife Expo 2002
Where: TP&W Headquarters, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, TX
When: 9 am-5 pm
Contact: Ernie Gammage at 512-389-4472
Fee: Free

Sun, Oct 6

Vegetarian Chili Cook-Off
Hosted by the Vegetarian Society of Houston.
Where: Splash Town
When: 12-5 pm
Contact: 713-880-1055
Fee: \$5

Mon, Oct 7

Ornithology Group Meeting – Bird Vision
Bob Fergus, Speaker.
Where: Bayland Community Center
When: 7 pm
Contact: Glenn Olsen at 281-345-4151
Fee: Free

Tue, Oct 8

Hands On Gardening 3 – Fertilizing Fundamentals
Where: Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane
When: 6:15-8:15 pm
Contact: 713-880-5540
Fee: \$10 for members, \$20 for non-members

Wed, Oct 9

Rice Design Alliance Lecture
Charles E. Beveridge, Speaker
Where: MFA, Houston

When: 7:30 pm
Contact: 713-348-4876
Fee: Yes; Please call

Urban Harvest Gala
Where: The Houstonian
Contact: 713-880-5540
Fee: Yes; Please call

Being a Player: The Lobbying Rules for Nonprofits
Sponsored by League of Conservation Voters.
Where: Austin, TX
When: 1-4 pm
Contact: Margot Clarke at 512-479-0077
Fee: Free; Preregistration required

Sat, Oct 12

Butterflies
For ages 5-9 + an adult.
Where: Houston Museum of Natural Science, Cockrell Butterfly Center
When: 9:15-11:30 am
Contact: 713-639-4629
Fee: \$15 for members, \$25 for non-members

Adopt-A-Wetland Educator Workshop
Includes a pontoon boat ride and ways to teach about & study wetlands. Reservations required.
Where: Armand Bayou Nature Center
When: 8 am-5 pm
Contact: 281-474-2551
Fee: \$20

Mon, Oct 14

How To Start A Community Garden
Where: Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane
When: 4-6:30 pm
Contact: 713-880-5540
Fee: Free; Pre-registration required

Tue, Oct 15

Naturalist Certification Program – In The Great Circle – Human Ecology, Part 2
Where: Houston Arboretum
When: 7-9 pm
Contact: 713-681-8433
Fee: \$15 for members, \$20 for non-members

Wed, Oct 16

Rice Design Alliance Lecture
Chris Wilson, Speaker
Where: MFA, Houston
When: 7:30 pm
Contact: 713-348-4876
Fee: Yes; Please call

Zero Biodiversity Loss and the World's Most Endangered Primates
Bill Konstant, Speaker

Where: Houston Zoo, Brown Education Center
When: 7 pm
Contact: 713-874-5102
Fee: \$10 for members, \$15 for non-members

Wed, Oct 16-Fri, Oct 18

Texas Tree Conference
Where: Waco, TX
Contact: 512-587-7515 or www.isa-arbor.com
Fee: \$135 by Oct. 4, \$160 after

Sat, Oct 19

Bay Day 2002
Contact: Galveston Bay Foundation at 281-332-3381

Natural History Field Trip – Ecology of the Big Thicket
Where: Houston Arboretum
When: 8 am
Contact: 713-681-8433
Fee: \$15

Nature Discovery Center Twilight in the Park Gala
Where: 7112 Newcastle
Contact: 713-667-6550
Fee: \$100

Ornithology Group Field Trip – San Jacinto Monument Park
Contact: Glenn Olsen at 281-345-4151
Fee: Free

Katy Prairie Conservancy Work Day
Contact: Alesha Herrera at 713-523-6135
Fee: Free; Pre-registration required

Tropical Treasures Educator Workshop
Where: Moody Gardens, Galveston
When: 9 am-4 pm
Contact: 1-800-582-4673 ext. 4231
Fee: \$35

Mon, Oct 21

How To Start A Community Garden
Where: Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane
When: 1-4 pm
Contact: 713-880-5540
Fee: Free; Pre-registration required

Tue, Oct 22

Hands On Gardening 4 – Growing Transplants
Where: Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane
When: 6:15-8:15 pm
Contact: 713-880-5540
Fee: \$10 for members, \$20 for non-members

Wed, Oct 23

Rice Design Alliance Lecture

Karen Kingsley, Speaker

Where: MFA, Houston

When: 7:30 pm

Contact: 713-348-4876

Fee: Yes; Please call

Bayou Preservation Association Fundraiser

Contact: 713-529-6443

Fee: \$100

Thu, Oct 24

Texas Recycles Day Fair

Sponsored by the City of Houston.

Where: City Hall Reflection Pool

When: 10 am-2 pm

Contact: Marilyn Leday at 713-837-9138

Fri, Oct 25 & Sat, Oct 26

Creepy Crawlers

Nighttime hikes through the forest, storytelling, face painting, hay rides, & more. Reservations required. Please call for more information.

Where: Armand Bayou Nature Center

When: 6-9:30 pm

Contact: 281-474-2551

Fee: \$8 for members, \$10 for non-members, children 2 and under free

Sat, Oct 26

Growing Winter Vegetables Organically

Where: Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane

When: 9:30 am-12 noon

Contact: 713-880-5540

Fee: \$10 for members, \$20 for non-members

Sun, Oct 27

Buffalo Bayou Canoe Tour

When: 1-5:30 pm

Contact: 713-752-0314

Fee: \$40

Ghostly Gardens

Trick or Treating, Creepy Crafts, Costume Contest with Prizes.

Where: Moody Gardens, Galveston

When: 2-6 pm

Contact: 1-800-582-4673

Fee: Please call

Tue, Oct 29

Naturalist Certification Program – The Universe

Where: Houston Arboretum

When: 7-9 pm

Contact: 713-681-8433

Fee: \$15 for members, \$20 for non-members

Regular Meetings

Meetings are monthly unless otherwise indicated.

Call to verify before attending a meeting. To list meetings, call 713-524-4CEC or fax 713-524-3311.

American Institute of Architects Environmental Committee 2nd Tues at noon. AIA office 3000 Richmond, Ste 500. 713-520-0155.

American Institute of Chemical Engineers 1st Thurs, Sheraton Astrodome, 610 Loop S. & Kirby Matthew Kolodney, 713-767-3752.

American Planning Assoc. 1st Tues, 11:45 am, The Court at St. James Place. Bret Keast 713-785-0080.

Bayou Preservation Assoc. 2nd Monday of Jan, March, May, Sept & Nov, 12 noon, Houston Center for the Arts, 713-529-6443.

BikeHouston last Tues, 6:30 pm, 3015 Richmond 713-652-2555.

Citizens' Environmental Coalition Board meeting 1st Tues, 6 pm, Houston Environmental Center, 3015 Richmond. 713-524-4CEC.

Electric Auto Association, Houston Chapter. 3rd Thurs, 6:30 pm, HEC 3015 Richmond, Suite 280. Ben Chamberlin, 713-975-7744.

Environmental Educator's Exchange 1st Wed of Feb, May, Aug, Nov, 5 pm. Sites vary. Kelly Drinnen, 409-683-4233.

Friends of Texas Wildlife, 2nd Sat, 10 am, Samuel Matthew Park, 1728 E. Hufsmith Road, Tomball, 281-255-8885 or Lynda Guertin, cell 713-825-4095.

Galveston Bay Estuary Program Quarterly. Call for specific dates: 281-332-9937.

Galveston-Houston Assoc. For Smog Prevention (GHASP) 3rd Thurs, 7:30 pm, 3126 Fairhope. Ron Parry, 713-669-1195.

Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, Monthly walking tours, 4th Sun, 2 pm. Historic Neighborhoods Council Meeting, 4th Sat, 10:30 am, Heights Branch Library. 713-216-5000 or www.ghpa.org.

Green Party 3rd Mon, Montrose Public Library 4100 Montrose. 713-866-6285 or 713-880-3219.

Gulf Coast Institute: Houston/Gulf Coast Smart Growth Initiative 4th Wed, monthly at 11:30 am, H-GAC, 3555 Timmons, 2nd floor. 713-523-5757.

Harris County Soil & Water Conservation District 1st Wed, 9 am. Bennie Billington, 713-855-8716.

HART – the Houston Animal Rights Team 1st and 3rd Thurs, 7pm, University of St. Thomas 2nd floor, Crooker Center (the student cafeteria) 713-527-9144 .

Historic Neighborhoods Council 1st Sun, 10:30 am, Heights Branch Library. Ramona Davis 713-216-5000.

Houston Arboretum & Nature Center 3rd Wed, 5:45 pm, Houston Arboretum. 713-681-8433.

Houston Archeological Society 2nd Fri, 7:30 pm, M.D. Anderson Hall, Univ. of St. Thomas. Tommy Nuckols, 713-664-8369.

Houston Audubon Society 2nd Wed, Sept-May. 7 pm, Brown Education Center, Houston Zoo. 713-932-1639.

Houston Bicycle Club, Inc 2nd Tues, except May. 7 pm, Tracy Gee Community Center, 3599 Westcenter Drive. 713-935-2810.

Houston Canoe Club Gen Mtg 2nd Wed, 7 pm, Red Cross Building, 2700 Southwest Frwy. Social Mtg 4th Wed, 7 pm Jax Grill, 1613 Shepherd. 713-467-8857.

Houston Homeowners Assoc 4th Mon (except November, Aug, and Dec), 5:30 pm, First Presbyterian, 5300 S. Main. Michael O'Brian, 281-496-0752.

Houston Renewable Energy Group Last Sunday of Jan, April, July, Oct., 2-4 pm, TSU School of Technology, Room 225. 713-524-2492.

Katy Prairie Conservancy 2nd Tues, 5:30 pm, Houston Environmental Center, 3015 Richmond, Suite 280. 713-523-6135.

Keep Houston Beautiful Quarterly meetings at 2700 Post Oak Blvd., Ste. 1728. 713-621-7020.

Legacy Land Trust 3rd Wed, 6 pm, Houston Environmental Center, 3015 Richmond, Suite 280. 713-524-2100.

League of Women Voters of Houston 2nd Thurs or Fri. 713-784-2923.

Mothers for Clean Air Quarterly. Call Jane Laping 713-526-0110.

Nature Discovery Center of Friends of Bellaire Parks 3rd Mon, 7 pm, Nature Discovery Center, 7112 Newcastle. 713-667-6550.

Native Plant Society of Texas 3rd Thurs (except Dec, Jan), 7pm, Houston Arboretum, 4501 Woodway, 713-431-6346.

Outdoor Nature Club 2nd Thurs, Sept-May. 7:30 pm (social begins at 7), Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet. 281-358-5407.

Piney Woods Wildlife Society 3rd Tues, 7:30 pm, Mercer Arboretum, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. 713-955-6667.

Sierra Club 1st Thur, 7:30 pm, Central Presbyterian, 3788 Richmond @ Timmons. 713-895-9309.

Texas Association of Environmental Professionals 3rd Thurs, 11:30 am, Brady's Landing, 8505 Cypress; Reservations: www.taep.org, reservation@taep.org, or 713-629-9119.

Urban Harvest Community Gardens Quarterly Meeting 4th Tuesday in January, April, July, 6-8 pm; Organic Gardening Classes weekly; workshops for outdoor classroom teachers annually summers. 1900 Kane. 713-880-5540.

Vegetarian Society of Houston 4th Wed, dinner mtg. at various local restaurants. 713-880-1055; Outreach volunteers call 713-880-1055.

White Oak Bayou Assoc 2nd Wed, 7:30 pm, Heights Fire House, 12th & Yale. For agenda, Fred Lazare, President, 713-864-9416 or Teresa Matlock, Treasurer, 713-864-3008.

Wildlife Rehab & Education Central/West: Carol at 713-661-5038 date and times. South/East: 2nd Wed 7 pm Sharon, 281-332-8319.

The Woodlands GREEN 2nd Tues (except Aug), 7:30 pm South County Library, Lake Robbins Rd. Karen Carter, 281-367-3457.

President's Letter Awards ceremonies

By David Gresham
CEC President

Many of you attended our Synergy Awards the other day. There's also the Emmys, the Tonys, the Oscars, and tons of others. Recognizing accomplishments is a way to point out to the rest of the world, "Hey, here's someone that's doing it right!"

Not all awards are recognition for doing things right, however. Most of us are familiar with Texas Monthly's Bum Steer Awards recognizing outstanding bone-headedness throughout the state. Well, a few years back, a friend and I created the Impala Awards. While we never had a formal ceremony, and were unwilling to actually spend money on an award, we were never the less on the lookout for nominees.

The Impala Awards were created to recognize complete ineptitude in design

and in great tradition, we named the award after its first recipient, the Chevrolet Impala – not the recent redesign, but the one from the late eighties with the aerodynamics of a hippopotamus. What were those designers thinking?

The awards are not limited to car design. Other recipients have included such outstanding examples as business cards with type too small to read, "dynamic" books that make the reader thumb through the book to find the next page and companies who have the instruction manuals for their products written in the language of the non-English speaking country which produced their product. I still can't set my VCR clock.

I think the most flagrant abuse of design is by product packaging designers. These are the folks who make those plastic coffins my new cell phone came in, the one that requires a machete to cut through, the plastic so tough that it cut my fingers while struggling to pull it apart with my foot on one end and both hands prying the other apart. These are also the good people who package an item the size of a pencil into a cardboard box so it will match all the other oversize packages on the store shelves.

I know that some of this is for "loss prevention." But the vast majority of this excessive packaging is strictly for marketing. The bigger the box, the more pictures and words can go on it to get my attention.

What troubles me most is the fundamental waste that goes with this packaging attitude. I recently purchased a digital camera. Not only were there massive amounts of plastic and cardboard in the packaging, it seemed most of it was devoid of any markings for recycle-ability or post consumer waste content. Although I have no direct control over the packaging my purchases come in, I can make the difficult choice of not buying products whose packaging is offensively excessive. I've even given thought to taking the product out of the packaging at the sales counter

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October 2002 Newsletter & Environmental Calendar

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