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ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

West Nile - the new AIDS epidemic?

Stay indoors, wear long sleeves, and cover yourselves in DEET warns the Center for Disease Control. From a tender newborn to a 92-year old man, the West Nile Virus does not discriminate as to the age of its victims. Although only first detected in New York in 1999, the number of those infected with West Nile Virus in the United States has grown almost exponentially over the past 3 months. The reason for heightened awareness of West Nile Virus is because it is known to cause fatal encephalitis; otherwise known as inflammation of the brain and spinal cord.

Missourians have good reason to be afraid. On August 29th, 2002, Missouri had only 25 cases of West Nile reported, but as of October 4th, 2002, Missouri had the second highest number of preliminary or confirmed human cases at 137. The state with the most cases at that time was Illinois, with over 600 human cases. Missouri is quickly approaching the total number of cases in all of the United States from 1999 to 2001, which was 149. In contrast, as of October 2002, South Carolina, North Carolina, and California have only one confirmed human case apiece.

West Nile Virus has reared its ugly head in several contexts. While it is widely known that the virus is transmitted from mosquito to human, other modes of infection have been discovered. For example, researchers at the Center for Disease Control believe that West Nile Virus can be, and has been, transmitted through blood transfusions and by the receipt of organs from someone infected with the virus. Therefore, there is hope that a test for West Nile Virus in donated blood will be in place by summer 2003. Ordinarily, such a test would take several years to develop, but due to the pressing risk to the U.S. blood supply, the FDA will, in all probability, implement an "experimental" test in the interim. A similar experimental test was put into place during the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s.

In addition to infection via blood products and organ transplant receipt, based on a recent case in Michigan, experts now believe that West Nile Virus can also be transmitted from mother to baby through breast milk. One mother contracted the virus through a post-birth blood transfusion, and three weeks later her baby tested positive for the virus as well. Due to the newborn's lack of exposure to the outdoors, researchers agreed that the infection must have passed through the breast milk. After the breast milk tested positive for the presence of the virus' genetic material; that assumption was affirmed. This baby is now the youngest person in the United States to be recognized as having West Nile viral presence, but fortunately the baby is currently healthy. Because it is known that some diseases, such as HIV, can be passed through breastfeeding, the Center for Disease Control advises mothers who are infected with the West Nile Virus not to breastfeed their newborns.

The alarming rate at which the West Nile Virus is affecting Missouri and other states only begs the question of what can be done to prevent new victims from contracting West Nile Disease. Thus, it is no surprise that eliminating mosquito breeding grounds is as good a place to start as any.

Surprisingly, used tires probably play a significant role in the spread of West Nile Virus, because they can hold standing water. On account of their shape, rimless tires have a unique capability of holding rainwater, which serves as a breeding ground for mosquitoes, including those that carry the virus. Also, mosquitoes quite often lay their eggs in the tires, which serve as shelter and protection until they become adult mosquitoes. Therefore, storing used tires in a way that prevents them from collecting rainwater can only curtail mosquito breeding.

Missouri has responded to this used tire problem. Missouri's Department of Natural Resources, the Missouri Department of Corrections, and tire removal companies have all succeeded in working together to safely dispose of over 10 million discarded tires in the past 10 years, with most of the removal occurring post 1996. This effort has been financed largely in part by a 50-cent per tire fee imposed on all new tire purchases in the state of Missouri. Additionally, the Department of Natural Resources has the authority to reimburse non-profit groups who undertake voluntary clean-up actions for their tire disposal costs. For each tire disposed of, the Department is allowed to pay the lesser of the actual cost of disposal, or two dollars.

At present, there exists no vaccine for West Nile Virus and no cure for West Nile Disease. Currently, 32 states and the District of Columbia have experienced human cases of West Nile Virus. Research is now underway to develop a vaccine. However, until a vaccine is developed the use of preventative measures is the only weapon that Americans have at their disposal. Tips for preventing West Nile infection from mosquito bites can be found on the Department of Health and Senior Services' website at (www.dhss.state.mo/WestNileVirus/index.html). For more information about safe tire disposal, consult the Department of Natural Resources' website at (www.dnr.state.mo.us/alpd/swmp.tirecost.htm).

KELLY E. SHAMEL

Great Failures, Small Successes: the 2002 Johannesburg Summit

The World Summit on Sustainable Development met in Johannesburg, South Africa in early September marking the ten-year anniversary of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. While the Rio Summit focused on global climate change, the Johannesburg Summit addressed the broader issues of international sustainable development, a policy that requires nations to cooperate in order to achieve economic growth while pursuing environmental quality and the elimination of poverty. Although the Johannesburg Summit failed to substantially address global climate change, to impose targets or timetables to its resolutions, or to eliminate energy and agricultural subsidies that perpetuate the plight of the poor in underdeveloped countries, the Summit may still have had redeeming value.

The Johannesburg Summit resulted in five common points of agreement between the 182 participating nations. First, the attending states agreed to halve, by the year 2015, the number of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation; second, to increase the use of renewable energy sources, and to increase consumers' access to affordable, environmentally sound energy as well as suppliers' access to free markets; third, to improve health by producing and using chemicals that do not cause adverse effects to humans or the environment; fourth, to develop "food-security strategies" for Africa by 2005 as well as maintain or restore depleted fish stocks where possible by 2015; and fifth, to significantly reduce biodiversity loss by 2010.

Environmental advocacy groups and others, who had hoped that the Rio Summit would lay the foundation for a world committed to the environment and the world's poor, have criticized the outcome of Johannesburg as a regressive step in the area of sustainable development. They criticized the Summit for resulting in vague expressions of environmental and humanitarian wants instead of committing to and implementing the concrete targets and timetables that the world needs.

Critical groups placed much of the blame on the United States and its economic stance on environmental issues. The conspicuous absence of President George W. Bush was perhaps justified,

in the eyes of the administration, given the heckling of protesters chanting "shame on Bush" during Secretary of State Colin Powell's one-day-only appearance before the delegates. In his speech, Secretary Powell highlighted increased American contributions to foreign aid, but emphasized that nations carry the responsibility to make themselves attractive to foreign investment through trade and by curtailing corruption, and that only these nations will have proven themselves to be deserving of aid.

Most observers noted, however, that the primary shortcoming of the summit was the inability to establish any substantial targets or timetables relating to global energy policy. Passionate delegations, such as the European Union, backed off of efforts to impose quantifiable energy targets, when strong opposition from the United States jeopardized any other success that might have been had at the Summit. Delegates from the United States were instructed to fight against the imposition of targets and timetables and entered a coalition with Japan and Middle Eastern oil interests to defeat a progressive energy policy.

The United States' strategy was reminiscent of its refusal to ratify the Kyoto Treaty in March 2001, where it argued that severe environmental controls to reduce the effects of global warming were too drastic in light of struggling world economy. Although Russia and China have recently announced their approval of Kyoto, it is unlikely that Kyoto or a progressive shift toward renewable sources of energy at Johannesburg would have had a substantial effect on the world's climate problems without the United States, which produces 25% of the greenhouse gases that cause global warming.

The Summit also failed to make a substantial commitment, with targets and timetables, to increase the competitiveness of underdeveloped countries in the global market by eliminating energy and farm subsidies. In response, "Green" delegates walked out of the Summit and attacked it as a promotion of globalization and international trade interests rather than a summit concerned with poverty and the environment. Many have become distrustful of the promises by industrialized economies, including the United States and the European Union, to cut the subsidies. Critics have noted that the same countries that promote free trade as a way to fight poverty are the countries that maintain \$350 billion in subsidies that keep poor nations' farmers out of the global market. These subsidies to rich nations' farmers are unmatched by equivalent aid contributions to poorer nations.

Finally, the most concrete target seems to be the commitment to halve the world's population that is without sufficient sanitation and access to water by 2015. Still, this target has been criticized as unrealistic since the world will have to pay about \$370 billion more than it does now to realize this goal. The United States' contribution of \$970 million over the next three years seems like pocket change in comparison.

From the start of the Summit, none of the points agreed on in Johannesburg were ever intended to be legally binding. Because none of the results of the Summit are binding, many believe that, without substantial targets and timetables, the Summit has failed to create even a minimum of public censure for noncompliance. Without tangible goals that make state governments answerable to the world, the Summit has been viewed as a toothless instrument of international policy making.

Nevertheless, the Johannesburg Summit may have accomplished the minimal level of success to justify the Summit's entertainment of 60,000 delegates at a cost of \$55 million. Although failing to establish concrete targets and timetables, the Summit did manage to clarify the global vision of sustainable development and entrenched sustainable development issues in the world's public and private forums.

In addition to the Summit's generally well-received work on water and sanitation, the broader inclusion of civil, non-governmental partnerships in the Summit has been viewed as a

positive step forward for sustainable development interests. The Summit's organizers made a serious effort to improve the transparency of the Summit negotiations by opening conference doors to the public and by seeking the inclusion of non-governmental interests through the participation of civil partnerships. Although the efforts have been criticized since most of the deal making still goes on behind closed doors, many believe that the lobbying efforts and financial resources of civil society may be the best hope for achieving what politicized national governments cannot.

This success was evidenced by WaterAid, a non-governmental organization that lobbied successfully for the most concrete target of the Summit – halving the number of people without proper water and sanitation by 2015. Two-hundred twenty partnerships attended the Summit, bringing with them \$235 million, and an additional 60 partnerships formed at the Summit.

Though the Johannesburg Summit was certainly a disappointment to environmentalists, the particularized failures of the Summit may not be sufficient to condemn the Summit as a whole. The Summit made concrete commitments to improving human health and agriculture. The United Nations made attempts to improve the transparency of summit process and, despite imperfections, broke ground in the inclusion of civil partnerships in the negotiations. Finally, the Summit placed the issues of sustainable development before the world and produced a vision clarifying how to achieve it. As Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, said, we must look at the Johannesburg Summit not as the end, but rather the beginning to a future of worldwide commitment to sustainable development.

THOMAS L. SCHMID

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

SB 1165 – Creates the “Pesticide Project Fund” Sponsored by Senators Mathewson, Childers, and Johnson

SB 1165 was introduced and read for the first time on February 14, 2002 in the Missouri Senate. A second reading and subsequent referral to the Senate Agriculture, Conservation, Parks and Tourism Committee occurred on February 27, 2002.

The bill was designed to repeal Missouri Revised Statutes Sections 281.240 and 281.260 while enacting three new sections relating to pesticide. SB 1165 was intended to create a “Pesticide Project Fund” in which annual pesticide registration fees were deposited.

The statute designated certain amounts of the fund be used toward specific purposes. First, up to twenty percent of the fund was to be used for administration of the “Pesticide Project Fund” and the pesticide registration program. Second, up to eighty percent was intended for pesticide education efforts, training, monitoring, pesticide container disposal initiatives, pest management practices, and other related issues. The remaining money could be used to fund pesticide related issues at the discretion of the director.

The Plant Industries Division of the Department of Agriculture was chosen to administer the “Pesticide Project Fund.” The bill also required the director to establish an advisory committee to evaluate projects and make recommendations upon disbursement of funds. SB 1165 set up procedures for the application process and distribution of funding while allowing the fund to have a maximum balance of five million dollars.

Along with creating the “Pesticide Project Fund”, SB 1165 stipulated that changes in a company's name, trade name, active ingredient, concentration of active ingredient, or EPA