

Chemical Trespass

Children's developing lungs are vulnerable

During the first seven days when my younger son, Zeke, then 14 years old, was in a neurological intensive care ward in Slovenia, no one knew whether he would live. He apparently was suffering either from toxic poisoning of the brain or viral encephalitis, but the clinical picture was clear neither to the Slovenian doctors nor, later, to U.S. doctors. Every succeeding day for the first seven days, Zeke was more completely paralyzed, and every other day another CAT scan showed a larger portion of his basal ganglia dead, surrounded by an infected area. He could not speak after the third day. We had been hiking in Kashmir and Ladakh, India for several weeks as part of an extended trip, and had been on our way to a long backpack trip in the Pyrenees when Zeke came down with neurological symptoms while we were briefly camping in the Slovenian Alps.



At the time, I had been working with Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides for almost seven years, and wrote in my journal that if I lost Zeke, I would take some comfort knowing I was working with a toxics reform organization, trying to prevent other parents from experiencing the same, profound helplessness of watching one's young child under attack and fading from some toxic agent.

Zeke did start recovering after the seventh day. When, after 23 more days, he was able to stand, we took him home to Eugene, grateful for 30 days of superb, round-the-clock care in Slovenia (which care was free to all Slovenians, by the way).

In early 2010, Oregon Toxics Alliance (OTA) received a call from a teacher's aide at Fairfield Elementary School in Bethel. She said that foul air was making it difficult for children on the playground to breathe, and suggested J.H. Baxter, about 2,100 feet to the south, might be the source of the bad air.

J.H. Baxter, headquartered in California, operates three wood treatment plants, including the 42-acre Eugene site, where wood preservatives such as creosote (a mixture of toxic chemicals) have been impregnated into telephone poles, wood pilings, and railroad cross-ties since the early 1940s.

In 2008, the year of their most recent report released under the federal Toxics Release Inventory, J.H. Baxter indicated they released almost 19 tons (37,829 pounds) of ammonia, a respiratory irritant, into the air near Fairfield Elementary. That same year, under the Eugene Toxics Right-to-Know law, they did not report releasing any ammonia into the same air, and only 92 pounds of total toxics into Eugene's air.

It's not yet clear why this non-reporting occurred, but OTA is looking into this and thus it will probably be corrected. (And yes, there are numerous reasons why reporting under Eugene's law and not just the federal law is important. For instance, strikingly lower pound thresholds for reporting a toxic, public input-output balancing, and regular audits are required by Eugene, but not federal law.)

But the real problem is chemical trespass of toxic substances into children's developing lungs. Fairfield Elementary school is in the Bethel School District, which reports an asthma rate (13 percent) that is 73 percent higher than the state and national averages of 7.5 percent. A wealth of scientific studies document that air pollution is associated with adverse respiratory outcomes and that chronic, adverse effects on lung development in children can lead to lifelong reductions in lung function.

This all leads, of course, to the never-ending need to implement alternatives to reliance on toxic substances – whether nuclear or chemical; automobile gasoline or weed killer; PVC pipe or toxics-treated telephone pole; cigarette or Gortex.

I haven't had to watch either of my children struggle to breathe due to asthma, but I'm sure it's the same helpless feeling I experienced in Slovenia, watching Zeke progressively unable to move, talk, or laugh out loud. So I'm grateful for the folks at Oregon Toxics Alliance: they're not only watch-dogging Eugene's toxics reporting law (the best in the nation); they're watching over your children and grandchildren and their developing lungs. But they can't do it alone.

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THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HEED THE HARM

Reading about UO football students committing sexual assaults and the unfolding horrors of the Catholic Church child abuse scandal is so very sad. It's sad not only for those affected by these abuses, but also what's so much worse is how little attention the vast majority of sexual assaults receive. These few isolated cases in the paper are but a tiny fraction of the hundreds of thousands of assaults committed every year in every town by every group of people you care to think about.

I don't know if people realize, but April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and I would love to hear Eugene/Springfield collectively shout "No more!" to the sexual violence that exists in our community. Help stand up against the rape of the homeless, those with disabilities, college students and the children being violated right now in homes in every part of Lane County.

Local nonprofit agency Sexual Assault Support Services (SASS) responded to almost 5,000 requests last year from people needing help. They have a 24/7 crisis line, support groups and advocates for the medical/legal systems. I want to ask every decent person out there to stand up and help end sexual violence by going to see SASS's production of the *Vagina Monologues* at the Very Little Theater on April 9-11. Please also support the other events throughout April like the Clothesline Project, Take Back The Night Rally & March and survivor poetry reading at Tsunami Books. Let's make our voices heard — we can make a difference!

Rebecca Taylor
Eugene

DESPERATE PLAN

Does anybody remember the people advocating for LCC to build a new campus downtown? Somebody correct me if this isn't another top-down project proposed by the power brokers and the anti-democratic majority in the City Council.

As we await a democratically inspired solution to the eyesores leftover from past urban renewal schemes, I have a suggested use for the Sears pit.

I would like to see the Sears pit reserved as a take-off and landing site for personal sub-orbital spacecraft. We will all be flying in such vehicles by the time local government, as it is now configured, gives us an appropriate remedy to the downtown blight.

Sorry LCC, but a new campus is a ridiculous proposal for the downtown site. Why? Downtown has parking problems.

Downtown parking is engineered to get you into trouble with the non-transparent and secretive municipal court (remember, no court reporter for the purpose of producing a transcript of your "trial").

The lack of adequate, long-term and free parking is what caused Sears to move out of downtown in the first place. Now, you are proposing a major new project that will create an impossible parking situation.

If LCC would like to do something to demonstrate that you honor your democratic origins, then build some truly affordable housing on the site. The affordable housing option would require less parking than a downtown commuter campus.

The LCC downtown campus plan is a desperate scheme, in a desperate situation, for desperate times. Don't do it.

Martin E. Williams
Eugene

ADVICE TO TEA PARTY

I'd like to get angry about the behavior of Tea Party activists as of late, but, frankly, all I can feel is depressed. The stories coming out of the D.C. health-care reform protests, the behavior of Tea Party folks at town hall meetings, the vile comments posted to the YouTube video of Rep. Val Hoyle — they all make me dismayed at the state of civic discourse in our country and the hostile environment towards debate.

I know plenty of conservatives with whom I can have reasonable conversations about issues. Our ideas about the role of government may differ, but we value (and even enjoy) respectful and honest debate.

lighten up

Oregon is cutting gambling treatment programs. The casinos need the business.

— Raphael Aldave