

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

Kudos to Camilla Mortensen and Micah Griffin for their scoop [cover story, 8/15] on what's rumbling through town. After the Lac Mégantic disaster I looked around, too. On tracks off Cross Street, the Carson Oil Co. was filling a truck with ethanol shipped by the Renewable Products Marketing Group, a Midwest distributor. It's highly flammable. Lots of oil cars were nearby.

Driving up Bethel Road parallel to a petroleum pipeline laid in 1962, Union Pacific reminds workers that "safety is my responsibility." A warning sign says "remote control locomotives" ply the area. How remote are the operators? In Québec, the Montréal, Maine and Atlantic Railway run by Edward Burkhardt, CEO of Rail World, has filed for bankruptcy.

Rail World, based in Chicago, buys distressed lines around the world, reorganizing them for profit. Separate lines in Canada, Vermont and Maine were combined to form MM&A in 2002. This vulture capitalism flourishes under neoliberalism. Regulations are constraints on profits. When disaster strikes they file for bankruptcy. Creditors and municipalities line up and foot the bills.

Union Pacific is larger and older than

Rail World. I once visited their Eugene yard and met with Adam Sharp, the headman. I was trying to get an abandoned campsite cleaned up near UP tracks along the Willamette River. They probably aided in the eviction. I was given a 1-800 number to call in Nebraska as the river swelled. If disaster were to strike here, what then?

Chris Piché
Eugene

CHEMOPHOBIA B.S.

I've struggled to contain my rage at anti-GMO protesters for months, but this is too far. On Aug. 8 in the Philippines, a test crop of Golden Rice was destroyed by anti-GMO activists. This crop is the culmination of over 20 years of work to address the massive problem of death due to malnutrition, specifically from people not getting enough vitamin A in their diets. It is estimated that two million people die every year and over half a million children go blind due to this problem.

The crop was destroyed because of fear. Chemophobia has gripped the world and when we hear the words "genetic modification," we see Monsanto and Bond villains. This is not the case. GM foods have saved literally more than a billion lives (look up Norman Borlaug).

I am thankful every day I live in America where I can *choose* to eat organic or not. I'd love to see legislation for GMO transparency, but I will not add to the irrational fear of chemophobia by being uninformed. Before you spread any more of this disinformation from bullshit websites like *Natural News*, please educate yourself. Otherwise, you're supporting the rabid ignorance that destroyed that crop. It means you'd rather half a million brown children go blind because of your goddamn convictions.

Jeff Holiday
Eugene

SCANT MENTION

Although the recent *Eugene Weekly* article [8/8] on Lane County Commissioner candidate Jose Ortal was informative, complete clarity on candidate Kevin Matthews' East Lane County length of residency was missing.

John Bauguess
Dexter

SOUR SLUGS

Why do we show up to watch the SLUG Queen Contest? I, for one, want to see outrageous costumes and hopefully some funny skits showcasing at least a little

performance talent. That's why I was very disappointed by the Old Queens' selection of Dr. Mildred Slugwak Dresselhaus as our new SLUG queen. It's nice that she has wonderful credentials in other fields, but alas, her performance talents weren't on display Friday night. This year she basically did a repeat of her last year's performance, and it was boring then.

Meanwhile, the first runner up, Professor Bulbous Slimbuldore, gave a bang-up, hilarious performance, which shows that he has been working hard on his act, and the second runner up, Gloria Slimen, gave another funny, crowd-pleasing performance.

So I have to wonder just what "bribes" have to be given to get that crown? If this keeps up, the SLUG queen contest will become as boring as the Eugene Celebration has become without the Harlequins and the Rickies.

Joyce M. Gallagher
Eugene

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Sept. 20 is the 50th anniversary of President Kennedy's second and final speech to the U.N. He called off the Cold War and offered to convert the Moon Race to a cooperative effort with the Soviet

VIEWPOINT BY JONAS EMERY

It's a Crude World

A LITTLE TRIP TO THE GROCERY STORE

The other day, I walked out and got into my car, which takes just plain old regular unleaded gasoline. I drove into town on the asphalt roads, which are a remarkable feature. They're basically just crushed gravel and tar or pitch (bitumen, technically), which is one of the leftovers from refining oil, and they cover an impressive amount of the surface of the Earth at this point. Less than .1 percent to be sure, but that is still a *lot* of asphalt.

So I drove on the asphalt roads to my favorite little locally owned organic grocery store and pulled into its asphalt parking lot. It's a very popular little market, my favorite place to shop, and I was lucky to get the last spot. All the other spots were already taken by cars, nearly all of which run on gasoline, even the hybrids. There was a Nissan Leaf there (let's hear it for the Japanese!), but it runs on electricity, possibly made from coal, sourced over miles and miles of wires that were made and erected using coal and diesel. They're not exactly solar powered at this point. And all of those cars are made of steel, which requires a lot of coal to smelt and mold into the car shapes needed to make the cars.

All of our cars were shimmering beautifully in the hot afternoon sun in a variety of dazzling colors. Silvers, blacks, reds, blues, beiges and whites, all made possible by paints derived from petroleum products. And the interior fabrics, growing warm in the closed car interiors, the nylons and polyesters and vinyls, were all created from oil in various processes. (Just think, when you wear a fleece jacket, you're wearing dinosaurs! Well ... more like really old algae actually.)

I dutifully brought my canvas grocery tote bags with me as I walked up to the front of the store, which was lit up like a Christmas tree, even in the bright afternoon sun. As soon as I stepped inside, a nice cold breeze surrounded me, provided by the store's industrial strength air conditioning equipment, which immediately set me at ease. Cool and relaxed, I picked up a plastic handbasket and languidly perused the organic vegetable aisles, kept cool in open-front refrigeration units.

I love produce aisles. All that teeming colorful bounty of life heaped on top of itself always lifts my spirits. There's just so much of it in such a small space. So many colors and flavors and textures. It makes me happy. It's like standing on a mountain top, or being in room full of puppies. I always leave the produce aisle feeling refreshed.

Organic red tomatoes from Mexico, organic green apples from Washington, even some organic yellow mangos from distant and exotic Costa Rica enticed me from orderly piles and baskets. Tractors that burn diesel or gasoline were undoubtedly used to grow all of that produce, which must have been shipped here on enormous 18-wheel trucks that burn tons of diesel and drive on mostly asphalt roads. I picked up a few apples and slipped them into a thin little plastic produce bag to keep them necessarily separated from my other groceries.

After passing placidly through the teeming kaleidoscope of international produce, I turned into the dry goods isles and wandered past rows and rows of nut butters, tahini and even Vegemite in shiny plastic jars. I picked up a plastic bag of deep-fried potato chips, healthy ones mind you, with the tiny, thin little shrivel of brown skin left on them, presumably for the vitamins. I then made my way down the beauty and health care aisle, full of shampoos, lotions, "natural" deodorants and various supplements from calcium to colostrum, all of which were packed in nice little plastic bottles. Plastics, of course, derive from oil as well. There are styrenes, and vinyls, and propylenes and nylons and countless derivations of those, all of which ultimately come from a barrel of crude oil sucked out of the ground long before they could house something as precious and weird as colostrum pills.

I couldn't find what I was specifically looking for, so I eventually sought out a friendly clerk.

I asked him, "Excuse me, do you have any Vaseline? Petroleum jelly? I just need a little 2-ounce jar or tube of it."

His eyes widened, the corners of his mouth turned down, his eyebrows arched and his head recoiled away from me slightly, causing his hair to wave a bit, which released into the air a faint waft of patchouli. Or was it tea tree oil? I get them confused.

He sized me up and stared slightly down his nose at me while declaring indignantly, "We don't carry any ... *petroleum* products here!"

Jonas Emery of Eugene is a biology and environmental science educator, administrator and damn fine whistler.

