

Newsletter

The Alamo Sierran e-Newsletter - April, 2014

* General Meetings *

Tuesday, April 15th: A Sustainability Plan for San Antonio

Students in the graduate Urban and Regional Sustainability class at UTSA are eager to present a draft of their sustainability plan for San Antonio to our general meeting. The students seek feedback on their efforts in order to develop a realistic and effective plan. The graduate students have been reviewing sustainability issues as well as sustainability plans and climate action plans from various cities.

Based on their research and their knowledge of San Antonio, they have developed a preliminary plan for San Antonio that is ready for review. UTSA Adjunct Associate Professor Bill Barker, AICP, is the instructor guiding the students.

Times, maps and speaker bios are on our Events page.

A Word from the Alamo Group Chair

I am very glad to have attended both days of the recent climate challenge event, "[San Antonio Environmental Challenges: Opportunities in Resilience Conference](#)", organized by [imagineSanAntonio](#) and [Solar San Antonio](#) and hosted by Rackspace. One of the most powerful presentations of the two day event (February 14 and 21) was that of Lieutenant General Ken Eickmann, USAF (ret.), a member of the [CNA Military Advisory Board](#) and Deputy Director of the Center for Energy Security at the University of Texas Austin. The MAB, composed of the highest level of military expertise—eleven retired three-star and four-star admirals and generals, formed in 2006 "to assess the impact of global climate change on key matters of national security, and to lay the groundwork for mounting responses to the threats found." Eickmann summarized their report, [National Security Implications of Climate Change — A Changing Security Landscape](#), and concluded the Department of Defense considers climate change to be the number one threat to American security.

The fact that the US Military concludes climate change is not only real but the top threat to national security should move San Antonians to take this seriously and act to do what we can as a community. While the conference included many great perspectives on how to respond to climate change, I hope we will focus on prevention of Green House Gas (GHG) pollution and promotion of carbon capture, without which, I believe, no level of resilience preparedness will suffice.

There are many novel and proven methods for limiting GHGs and increasing carbon capture. In October 2013 Alamo Sierrans hosted Bruce Melton, a professional engineer, environmental researcher, author, and climate science outreach specialist from Austin, who introduced many scientific discoveries and solutions for capturing carbon. His [Climate Change Now](#) is a clearinghouse of reports, articles, documentaries, and shorts on climate science findings.

One solution of growing interest for limiting GHG is carbon taxation (for more information on carbon taxes go to [Carbon Tax Center](#) and [Center for Climate and Energy Solutions](#), or C2ES). Where carbon taxes have been adopted, studies show, even in the face of competition unconstrained by the tax, they have proven successful in lowering fuel consumption and GHG emissions and proven a neutral or positive economic impact.

Many countries have adopted carbon taxes. Finland was the first country to enact a carbon tax, in 1990, followed by the Netherlands in 1990, Sweden and Great Britain in 1991, Denmark in 1992, Costa Rica in 1997, Switzerland in 2008, Ireland in 2010, and Australia in 2012. According to C2ES, "as of 2013, several countries—China, Mexico, South Africa, and South Korea—are considering implementing a carbon tax." Due to ideological gridlock, structural dysfunction, and the political influence of big money—especially from fossil fuel—carbon taxation is struggling in committees of the US Government.

States, counties and cities are proven governance innovators, and this is true with carbon taxes too. The first state in North America to enact a carbon tax was Quebec, in 2007, followed by British Columbia in 2008. Through the Pacific Coast Collaborative, which includes B.C., California, Oregon, Washington and Alaska, the initiative is spreading. In the US, Oregon ([Carbon Tax and Shift: How to Make it Work for Oregon's Economy](#)), Washington and California have advanced the issue farthest, along with New York, and Massachusetts. Many other states have had initiatives, including Texas. Two US cities have adopted a carbon tax. Boulder, Colorado, was the first, in 2006, [as reported in the New York Times](#). In 2007 San Francisco instituted a charge on CO2 emissions.

Several recent books ("If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities," "The Metropolitan Revolution" and "A Country of Cities") make the case that progressive cities are uniquely positioned to lead in addressing the global challenges we face, such as climate change. One key is their collaborative diversity. It is for that reason that we can

hope that initiatives such as imagineSanAntonio, a diverse consortium of collaborative civic leaders, professionals, business alliances, educators, city and county agencies, and non-profits, can help San Antonio become a Texas and National leader, not just for resilience in the face of this damaging air pollution, but to adopt a carbon tax and experiment and apply carbon capture science.

Margaret "Peggy" Day, ExCom Chair

Lion's Field Events

Monthly films and presentations for your edification and enjoyment

Wednesday, April 23rd: *Living Downstream*

We are all downstream. This eloquent film discusses the connection between the environment and human health. It follows an ecologist during one year as she travels across North America, working to break the silence about cancer and its environmental links.

Wednesday, May 28th: *Adventure Travel: Andalusia, Spain, and Morocco*

Alan Montemayor and Cheryl Hamilton share their experience traveling through Andalusia, Spain, and Morocco. Their travels cover the whole range from culture to nature, and are fascinating, educational, and comprehensive.

Our Lion's Field events are **free** and open to the public. They occur on the fourth Wednesday of each month at the Lion's Field Adult Center, 2809 Broadway @ Mulberry. Programs begin at **6:30 p.m.**.

Visit our Lion's Field Events page for a map and additional information.

Emissions From Local Cement Plant Implicated in Neighbors' Illnesses

My family moved to the Cedar Grove Subdivision in May 2013, and shortly thereafter we began to get sick. I started looking into it further, and talked to neighbors. Vulcan Materials Quarry & Ready Mix, Alamo Cement and Capitol Cement are in a tight cluster in Northeast San Antonio just north of 1604 between Bulverde and Green Mountain, and at least one of these facilities is releasing toxic particles that are going to neighboring communities. According to my research, many of these releases have not been reported to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).

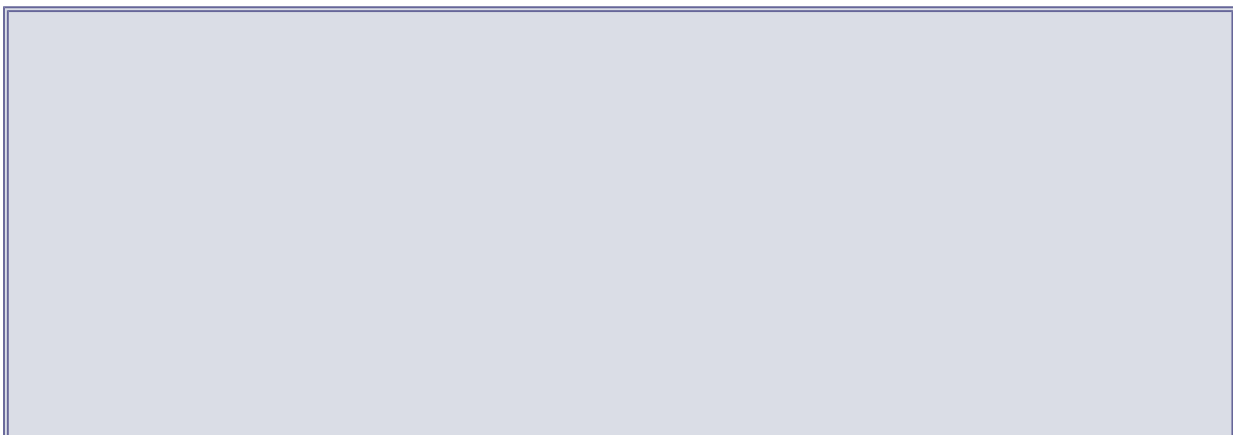
I started looking into the materials used in Vulcan's facility: these include silica¹, a cause of cancer and other diseases, especially in workplaces where there is lots of human exposure to silica dust. According to Vulcan's website, they manufacture Portland Cement which, [according to OSHA](#)², typically contains small amounts of hexavalent chromium, a substance which has been proven in studies on humans to be a carcinogen³.

The first dumping event that TCEQ investigated happened on October 19⁴, and a coat of sediment fell from the sky. The TCEQ took samples, but did not advise residents on how to clean it up. People I spoke people within the Cedar Grove and Steubing Ranch Subdivisions got sick after this dumping, many with upper respiratory problems.

The following symptoms that we experienced in our house are associated with silica and hexavalent chromium (the same compound exposed by Erin Brockovitch in Hinkley, California, 1996): Chronic cough; dry, itchy eyes; nose bleeds; mucous plugs in my four year old's lungs; decreased blood-oxygen levels despite being on the highest dosages to treat asthma symptoms; muscle cramping; loss of balance; headaches; confusion; abdominal cramping; asthma. I also suspect that these particles may be implicated in ear drum perforation and tooth problems.

There have been other "dumping events" since then, one on Christmas Day, according to the Steubing Ranch Facebook page. Around December 3, 2013, there was a fire at the facility, documented in [this video](#)⁵, with multiple small explosions. According to George Ortiz at TCEQ, this event was not reported within the prescribed 48 hour time frame. Note that this facility has petroleum storage tanks.

Vulcan sits on the recharge zone of the Edwards Aquifer, which stretches from Salado to Del Rio, and supplies water to millions of people. November 8, 2013, a Friday, I observed Vulcan tearing up its plant entrance and redirecting stormwater runoff to flow, unfiltered, over the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone (see picture below). TCEQ said Vulcan did not notify them of their plans. There was a subsequent dust cloud from this event, and we experienced more upper respiratory distress than "usual."





Friday night construction work at entrance to Vulcan Material plant

Cooperatively, I let people from Vulcan's headquarters in Alabama take samples from the inside of my house. Since there are no indoor air quality protocols in Texas, I was unable to afford mirrored tape-lift tests. The following elements were found in my house and are unlike a typical household dust profile: silica, aluminum, and magnesium. I did not see a complete analysis; I recently had someone from a university take swab samples for metal speciation analysis since there are no indoor air quality protocols in Texas.

Vulcan said that my claims about there being so much particulate matter in our ambient air from the track-out from their plant is unfounded; my silica particles were more fibrous than their silica particles taken from inside their quarry office. The substance released in large quantities during these "dumping events" is corrosive, often eating away the clear coats of people's cars and damaged windshields, and yet we have cleaned it up and still don't know what it is.

Furthermore, residents of the Steubing Ranch and Cedar Grove subdivisions became sick during the clean up. Residents basically have to fend for themselves. However, in February SAWS opened an investigation addressing Vulcan's track-out, and their report is pending.

I urge you to call George Ortiz of the TCEQ and ask him why they didn't respond to this as a "spill," and why they haven't released complete results. Demand an inspection of the safety and habitability of neighboring communities, as well as a proper clean up. Demand that it be recognized for the TCEQ to hold any responsible partie(s) accountable for any releases of toxic or noxious particulates.

Here is Mr. Ortiz's contact information:

George L. Ortiz, Air Section Manager, Region 13 - San Antonio, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
Direct: (210) 403-4030, Office: (210) 490-3096, Fax: (210)545-4329, george.ortiz@tceq.texas.gov

Vulcan and the TCEQ both have a duty beyond the lay person to be responsible. Their actions have the ability to affect hundreds of thousands of people that rely on the aquifer, until something changes.

Where we stand now:

- we still don't know what the "dust" is completely composed of
- continued dumping events
- people are still getting sick, or not getting better
- There is still track-out from the facilities' trucks
- Dust still coats streets and grassy areas
- the amount "stuff" in our air, our homes, or in the Aquifer (SAWS is on this now)...is unknown

Air Monitor by Alamo cement shows toxic particles in the air daily

- TX Speaker of the House Joe Straus' office has requested that the TCEQ report to them about this investigation

References:

- 1) TCEQ permits RN102751484 & 102655412 for crushed and broken limestone and ready mix.
 - 2) Occupational Safety and Health Administration; "[Preventing Skin Problems from Working with Portland Cement](#)"
 - 3) Environmental Protection Agency, Air Toxics Web Site; [Chromium Compounds Hazard Summary — Created in April 1992; Revised in January 2000.](#)
 - 4) KHOU, Houston; "[TCEQ investigates thick mystery dust covering neighborhood near plant](#)"; Karen Grace, October 24, 2013.
 - 5) YouTube.com; [Fire at Vulcan cement plant-San Antonio TX](#); Damian Sanchez, December 3, 2013.
- Krystal Henagan, Sierra Club member*

Social Events

meet and greet your Sierra Club friends

Friday, April 25th, 6-8 PM: *La Tuna*

Good assortment of food to wash down with a beer. Join us outside and enjoy San Antonio's beautiful spring weather under the trees. 100 Probandt Street.

Friday, May 23rd, 6-8 PM: *La Fogata*

Join us on the patio for good Mexican food and a margarita. 2427 Vance Jackson Road, 340-1337

If you're not busy on these days, then get out of the house and join us for a meal and a chance to "meet and greet" some of your fellow members. If you would like to be reminded about our upcoming Socials, email [Lloyd Cortez](#). Then one week before the next Social, you will receive an email notice.

Visit our Social Events page for maps, times and more information about these gatherings.



We Love a Parade

Saturday, April 26, is the King William Parade, a highly entertaining Fiesta event. This year the parade theme is "Traditions Old and New".

Since San Antonio's City Council is still deliberating on a carryout bag ordinance, the Alamo Group has plans to enact old and renewed carryout bag traditions. Some of us will begin our parade entry dressed in old-fashioned clothes with old-time shopping baskets and bags.

Following this will be marchers dressed from the 80's and 90's with plastic bags, followed by Bag Monsters with arms of ugly branches clotted with tattered plastic bags and other visible ill effects. Then we will have marchers carrying our 2014 It's in the Bag! campaign's reusable eco bags, followed by all kinds of proud shoppers in modern clothes with reusable shopping bags, baskets, wheeled collapsible carts, and all kinds of new and ingenious carryout containers.

Are you creative? Join in the fun and help with this worthy cause. Please **contact Gay Wright**, (210) 362-1984. if you are interested in participating.



Volunteers Needed for Tabling at Spring Fairs

Volunteers are needed for tabling events. We go to "green" events and man a table where we provide info about our local and national Sierra Club and collect signatures on petitions concerning local environmental issues. For more info or to sign up contact [Gay Wright](#), 210-362-1984.

- **April 4 Friday** — "Fresh Air Friday", Main Plaza, 11:30 am-1 pm. Alamo Area Council of Governments' Natural Resources Dept and the City of San Antonio's Office of Sustainability.
- **April 12, Saturday** — "Viva Botanica!", San Antonio Botanical Garden, 10-2
- **April 17, Thursday** — "NVC Earth Day", Northwest Vista College, 3535 North Ellison, 9-1
- **April 21, Monday** — "Earth Day Celebration", Courtyard on SAC's main campus, 10-2
- **April 22, Tuesday** — SAC's "Eco Centro Dedication", N. Main at Locust St., 9:30-2

Sign Up for Action Alerts

The Sierra Club is all about citizen action on critical issues. Quick citizen input often spells the difference between victory and defeat for important measures at the local and state levels. Sign up now to receive our local e-mail Conservation Action Alerts and let your voice be heard. **Call (674-9489) or email [Lloyd Cortez](#)** and we'll add you

name to our growing list of environmental activists.

Fracking in the Eagle Ford Shale

Air does not respect city limits

This was one of the themes cited during the tour of some Eagle Ford Shale fracking sites and was reinforced the following day in the San Antonio offices of Congressional Representative Pete Gallego. Both events were organized by Dani Neuharth-Keusch, Field Associate with Environment Texas.

At 9:00 a.m. on Sunday, March 16th, we gathered and were soon driving through the heaven that is the countryside and small towns of South Texas. Throughout the day, our tour guide, who has watched the changes occur in their home region as fracking has "boomed" on their landscape, and studied to understand the industry since 2009, told what is happening in the towns such as Cuero, Cheaptown and Nordheim via real peoples' life stories.

We saw flares that quiet Sunday, and there was truck activity going to dump sites and disposal wells. We saw various kinds of color-coded trucks used in the fracking process (condensate trucks, waste disposal trucks) and noted their roughening effect on the roads we travelled. Not only the roads are damaged in the fracking process.

Disclaimer: I am an ecocritical visual artist, not a scientist; still, I strive for accuracy. This is a very brief, basic account of a nearly 12-hour tour, touching on some of the major questions that we had, and some concepts new to us, such as The Land Man, surface rights, mineral rights, set-backs, flare / dirty flare, condensate, salt water / salt water disposal well.

We asked, "Where are all the jobs?" We asked about workers' rights, legal protection for the water, the air. Laws that protect our lungs. And property rights, the effect of fracking on livestock.



Dirty flares

Some Answers & Vocabulary Defined

The Land Man is likely the first person property owners meet in the fracking process. He offers money for mineral & surface rights. As I understand it, these rights in turn are sold to a broker. These middle men can make much more money than the property owners. Some landowners' surface rights and / or mineral rights had been bought up a generation or two back, so they made no money and had no say.

"Jobs?" "Driving through," was the answer. Not local people. Trained crews are moved around as sites are depleted.

Workers wear hardhats but they don't wear masks or breathing apparatus. Concerned about our own lungs (since, to quote from a fact sheet, "... test results show fracking flowback emissions are dangerous toxins, not 'steam',") we kept the van windows rolled up most of the time, and only got out for a restroom / lunch break, to meet a land owner, and, once, to take photos of an interesting site. Entering one site, a window was briefly rolled down to take a photo, but instantly rolled up as a harsh smell blew in.



Water

Millions of gallons of water are used for each well. According to Dani, "110 billion gallons of freshwater have been used in Texas since 2005, which is 141 times the volume of the Cowboys Stadium. And 260 billion gallons of waste water were produced in 2012 alone." See "[Fracking by the Numbers](#)" from Environment Texas for additional information.

Dani issued us Fracking Action Camp Activist Kits. My "favorite" fact from that is: Texas fracking has produced 40 million metric tons of global warming pollution since 2005.

Google "Halliburton loophole". It explains why fracking is exempt from the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974.

There ARE requirements for oil pipelines going through aquifers: Steel pipe encased in another steel pipe encased in concrete. There is no law requiring oil & gas companies to test their waste to see if it is toxic, so technically, nobody "knows" how toxic it is or if it is radioactive ... nobody is required to know.

Set-backs state the distance a fracking site must be from buildings designed for human occupancy. It is important to have set-backs so that a fracking site is not able to be legally built at the city limits or across the street from a school. Otherwise, you'll see flares outside of your town's high school window.

"Salt water" sounds innocent enough, but it can explode. According to about.com:

*a **saltwater disposal well** is where the water from oil and gas well production is discarded. Called "saltwater" euphemistically by industry, this fluid is considered hazardous waste because of its high salt content, hydrocarbons, and industrial compounds.*

Condensate can cause damage to the nervous system when inhaled. Hydrochloric acid eats asphalt. Condensate is forbidden from spilling onto streets ... but it does. The identity of chemicals in proprietary chemical mixes are protected by law. Lungs, not so much.

Little flags along the roads mark where pipelines were laid. But pipes shift as the lands shift. One way to dispose of some wastes is to pump them into the ground, rather deeply (6k feet), but not encased in anything. We heard about

Be sure to visit the upcoming "Frackaso! Portraits of Extraction in the Eagle Ford Shale" exhibit. The opening is **April 18th** at 7:00 pm at the **Esperanza Peace & Justice Center**, 922 San Pedro Avenue.

the **earthquakes in Azle, Texas.**

For some operators, it is cheaper to operate illegally than to retrofit. They just pay the fines & keep on going. They don't pay city taxes. We wondered why the towns don't protect themselves better by just moving their "Welcome To" signs farther out / get deeper set backs.

We visited a landowner whose family's and property's health were threatened by two proposed large open-pit waste disposal sites. Of concern is the potential spread of toxicity from the waste site to the family's property. Educational displays made by the landowner showed **maps** and labeled photos of rainfall. According to one picture of rainwater flowing in rivulets, just 1.1 inches of rainfall within one hour could be problematic --- and rains of 5 inches per hour had fallen in the recent past. Deep concerns for grandchildren were voiced.

As our tour wound down, the guide said, "I'm pleased to see that there was NOT ONE dirty flare today." There were a number of flares photographed during the tour. Still we had to ask about fracking: Why? Answer: Money.





In conclusion

We went to Pete Gallego's office as a follow-up to the tour, having seen with our own eyes and smelled with our own noses the state of the Eagle Ford shale areas, to encourage the representative to support HR 2825, The CLEANER Act. [[Closing Loopholes and Ending Arbitrary and Needless Evasion of Regulations \(CLEANER\) Act](#)] This bill would close the loophole that allows fracked waste to be excluded from The Clean Air Act.

Gallego's staff told us that the Representative's hometown, Alpine, Texas had clean air ... until recently. After all, air does not respect city limits.

*Alice Canestaro-García, visual artist & representative of Energía Mía
photographs by Kathy Glass of 350SanAntonio.org*

Alamo Group Resolves to Support Streetcar

On March 20th, the Executive Committee of the Alamo Sierra Club passed the following resolution supporting VIA's multimodal goals and the Modern Streetcar:

BE IT RESOLVED: That the Alamo Sierra Club supports VIA Metropolitan Transit's multimodal goals and Modern Streetcar. The streetcar meets environmental goals of reducing bus congestion downtown, reduces air pollution and noise, calms traffic in streetcar corridors, encourages increased density in the downtown core, encourages active lifestyle of cycling and walking, removes automobiles from routes, provides fast and reliable service to all income levels, will be the starter line for future multimodal transportation further improving connectivity, reduction in sedentary lifestyles, and many other benefits that are more sustainable.

The streetcar is "just one of six major capital investments that comprise VIA's [SmartMove](#) Program and will significantly improve transit services in the region" according to VIA. Go [here](#) to view VIA's future comprehensive plans.

What comprises Phase 1 of the streetcar project? It includes two routes, 10 minute intervals between streetcars, projected annual ridership in 2017 of 1.1 million, \$183.6 million base estimate for Phase 1 (without contingency), \$210 million local budget, and several opportunities to transfer to a bus, including transfers at the Westside Multimodal Transit Center.

According to VIA, streetcar vehicles have a typical capacity of 115 to 130 riders, a length of 60 to 80 feet, and a width of about eight feet. They are electrically-powered and will operate in the same lanes as private vehicles with an average speed of eight to 25 miles per hour. They move through dense urban areas on circulator routes and take riders to various points of interest. Urban-scale development occurs along and near the routes.

VIA has been given approval by the FTA to continue the development of a "federal funding investment request" for the streetcar, according to VIA. To read more about how the streetcar funding is the first stage in applying for federal monies to match local funds already secured, go to this [VIA site](#).

Phase 1 of the streetcar will be completed in 2017. Again, visit VIA's exciting [SmartMove](#) site to learn more.

Barb McMillin

Outings: Beautiful Central Texas Weather Beckons

Visit the [Alamo Sierra Club Outings page](#) on Meetup for detailed information about **all** of our upcoming Sierra Club Outings.