



Newsletter

The Alamo Sierran e-Newsletter - March, 2014

* General Meetings *

Tuesday, March 18th: Queen of the Sun: What Are the Bees Telling Us?

A 2011 film on the complex issue of disappearing and dying bees from Colony Collapse Disorder. Bees pollinate plants, thus providing a valuable service. Learn more about the possible causes of the disappearing bees and the solutions. Are we doing the best we can to protect the bees so that they can continue to pollinate plants? This documentary has won numerous awards.

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

A Word from the Alamo Group Chair

My last Word (in the February issue of this newsletter) touched on household hazardous waste, or HHW. Batteries are one form of HHW that seem to be more common than ever. I wanted to share with you the progress we have made in addressing the hazards presented by batteries. As noted, local regulations are ambiguous, even ambivalent, about hazardous household waste and batteries. Citizens are told to “properly dispose” of them, which is generally understood to mean put them in the trash but at the same time urging us to voluntarily recycle.

Why is recycling urged? I see four main reasons. Household batteries contain some highly toxic, corrosive, or flammable chemicals that require careful management to prevent harm to people and the environment. Current standards for landfills are deemed inadequate to prevent eventual pollution. The materials have value and most can be reprocessed into new batteries or products to help preserve resources. Finally, more studies convince decision-makers that greater precaution should be exercised. These factors tip the scales toward recycling.

For example, a 1994 meta study reported on aquatic bioassays (controlled studies on aquatic life) done in five states that showed that alkaline batteries with mercury were found to be toxic and had resulted in the batteries being classified as hazardous waste in those states. A year later the EPA established the 1995 Universal Waste Regulations with standards that finally included batteries. In 1996 the Mercury-Containing and Rechargeable Battery Management Act was passed by Congress, which reduced the amount of highly toxic mercury in batteries and set up the Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation that operates today as Call 2 Recycle, which must manage a collection and recycling program for rechargeable batteries. In 2012, the non-profit Corporation for Battery Recycling (CBR) was formed by Duracell, Energizer, Panasonic and Rayovac, the four largest US battery companies. CBR set up a voluntary National Household Battery Recycling Program and recently issued a request for proposals in a search for a business partner to manage the collection and recycling of household batteries with the stated goal to reuse the spent materials and reduce waste to zero.

There are many kinds of household batteries, from the button batteries, to AA, AAA, C, D and 9-volt types, as well as those built in to all types of small equipment, such as cordless phones, laptops, alarms, and power tool battery packs common in homes. Some are more toxic than others and may contain the heavy metals cadmium, mercury, lead, and zinc, as well as silver, nickel, and lithium, which are less problematic, as are most alkaline batteries today. Some are recycled, some not.

Rechargeable batteries are advisable if you use a lot of batteries, because of the lower total use cost and environmental impact. However, rechargables contain worse toxins than non-rechargeable alkaline batteries. Most common rechargeable batteries are nickel-cadmium (NiCad), lithium ion, or nickel-metalhydride (NiMH). They power all kinds of devices, everything from flashlights and toys, to portable and cordless phones, laptops and personal digital assistants (PDAs), cordless tools, and grooming products. NiCads are good batteries, but the cadmium in them is toxic, so they should be recycled. NiMH and lithiumion rechargeable batteries are less harmful, but it is still recommended that they be recycled. Some rechargables are sealed lead-acid batteries, used in camcorders, radios, uninterruptible power supplies for computers, and cell phones.

Tiny button batteries are used in hearing aids, calculators, watches, toys, digital thermometers, and many other products. They are not rechargeable, may contain heavy metals such as mercury and cadmium as well as silver and zinc, and should be recycled. A 2005 study showed that three types of button batteries contained allowable amounts of mercury: silver oxide, 2.5 mg; zinc air, 8.5 mg; and alkaline, 10.8 mg.

Call 2 Recycle only accepts rechargeable NiCad, NiMH, Lithium-Ion, and sealed lead-acid batteries under 2 lbs.. Car batteries, silver and zinc based button batteries, or disposable alkaline batteries are NOT accepted. Symbols on the

Food for thought

The man killed the bird, and with the bird he killed the song, and with the song, himself.

— From a Pygmy legend, quoted in *Walking Down the Wild - a Journey Through the Yellowstone Rockies* by Gary Ferguson

batteries (below) help you determine whether your rechargeable batteries are covered by the program [note the labels on the symbols: lithium (Li), lead (Pb), nickel cadmium (Ni-Cd) and nickel-metal hydride (Ni-MH)].



Today it is very convenient to recycle your rechargeable batteries. About 30,000 retail stores in the U.S., like Home Depot, Lowes, Target, Wal-Mart, Radio Shack, and others, are now collection points free of charge. To find a drop-off location nearby, go to website call2recycle.org/locator.

It has taken a sustained national movement to achieve better standards, safer designs, diversion of some batteries from the waste stream, and producer take-backs for processing and reuse of these resources. However, the job is not finished. It is hard to find data, if there is any, on the percentages recycled in the US, but this investigation suggests the numbers of HHW batteries recycled is low. So it is important for Alamo Sierrans to carry on this work, seeing that hazardous battery recycling becomes universal through partnerships for public education campaigns and producer and user responsibility.

Please respond to our Battery Recycling Action Alert. Rayovac, one of the CBR members, unfortunately still urges its consumers to just put used batteries in the trash. Our partner Texas Campaign for the Environment has an online petition requesting Rayovac take responsibility for the end-of-life of batteries it produces. Go to texasenvironment.org and sign the petition. If you would like more information on this issue please read this [Sierra Club letter to Rayovac](#).
Margaret "Peggy" Day, ExCom Chair

Snakefestsst!

March 8th 9 am-2 pm, at Government Canyon State Natural Area. Events will take place around the visitor center and pavilion areas. Celebrate snakes and snake conservation with the whole family! Programs, activities, crafts, displays, live music and live snakes!

Dress and prepare to be outdoors (sunscreen, water, jacket and hat). For more information e-mail niki.lake@tpwd.texas.gov or call 210-688-9055 x292. The Texas Parks and Wildlife web page for this state natural area is [here](#).

Lion's Field Events

Monthly films and presentations for your edification and enjoyment

Wednesday, March 26th: *Flow*

This documentary discusses the world's dwindling water supply and the role that greed plays in it. It concentrates on business of privatization of water infrastructure which prioritizes profits over availability of clean water.

Wednesday, April 23rd: *Living Downstream*

We are all downstream. This eloquent film discusses the connection between the environment and human health. 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.

UTSA United to Serve

Does your organization have need of a work service team for environmental restoration, working on a school learning garden, or other project in need of some help? The Alamo Group is willing to help organize UTSA United To Serve student volunteers to work the morning of Saturday, April 5. For more information contact Gay Wright, 210-362-1984, alamo.sierra@yahoo.com.

Please complete the on-line application by 5 pm on Monday, March 17th. Contact Leslie Garcia at Leslianne.Garcia@utsa.edu with any questions or call 210-458-7291. Your agency will be notified of your posting status. The on-line sign up application for your project is at surveymonkey.com/s/UnitedToServe.

Criteria for Selection

Not all submissions will be accepted. Several different factors will be considered when reviewing applications, which include but are not limited to:

- Project is able to accommodate 15 -75 volunteers
- Project length is between 3-4 hours, preferably in the morning (and occur on 4/5/14)
- All required waivers (if applicable) are attached with application
- All training and supplies are provided by agency
- Overall safety of the project

Social Events

meet and greet your Sierra Club friends

Friday, March 28th, 6-8 PM: *MadHatters Tea House & Café*

Join us for a good cup of soup and salad, a sandwich or a yummy dessert. 320 Beauregard Street, 212-4832.

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.

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 [Loyd Cortez](mailto:Loyd.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.



Tablings

Volunteers are needed for tabling events. We go to many "green" events and distribute information about the Sierra Club and provide petitions about environmental concerns to be signed by the events' participants. These are the upcoming events we plan to attend. For more info or to sign up contact [Gay Wright](mailto:Gay.Wright), 210-362-1984.

- **March 8 Saturday** — Spring Bloom, SAWS headquarters, US 281 at Mulberry, 9 am-1 pm.
- **March 15 Saturday** — Kendall County Outdoor Family Fair, Boerne, Main Plaza, 10 am-1 pm.
- **March 30 Sunday** — Siclovia, YMCA of Greater San Antonio at Reclovia, between S. Alamo and Roosevelt, 11 am-4 pm.
- **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.

San Antonio's Air Quality Issues

On February 11, the Alamo Group co-sponsored with the Trinity University Environmental Studies program, a public event at the university on San Antonio's air quality Issues. This topic is especially timely because ozone pollution in this region has been rising dramatically in recent years, despite some important reductions in pollution-producing emissions from CPS (especially from coal-fired energy production) and VIA public transport (from older diesel-fueled buses). We applauded the City Council's decision to be pro-active, not waiting for EPA pressure to develop a plan of action.

Our speakers included Peter Bella, Alamo Area Council of Governments (AACoG); Vincent Fonseca, MD, a Sierra Club member, with specialization in environmental medicine; and Dr. Meredith McGuire, Trinity University professor and Co-Chair of our Conservation Committee. Both the informative talks and the lively Q&A made us very aware of how critical it is for San Antonio to reduce air pollution as much and as soon as possible, because it is already causing widespread, sometimes deadly, health problems such as asthma, heart attacks, and cancer.

Unfortunately, city council does not have the power or authority to curb some of the emissions that are causing problems for our region. For example, San Antonio is downwind of the oil and natural gas extraction from the Eagle Ford Shale, which daily releases enormous amounts of toxic and ozone-forming pollutants. But the area where these pollutants enter the air is outside San Antonio's environmental control (i.e., a cluster of 8 counties immediately around the city). So not only city council, but all informed citizens need to press the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and the state legislature to do much more to protect our environmental health.

The discussion pointed to one valuable tool that could be used more extensively in San Antonio – air quality monitoring. Although the existing monitors provide some useful indicators of air quality problems, we need both more monitors (to identify neighborhoods with the most serious problems) and monitors that detect a wider range of air pollutants. One question from the audience raised the problem experienced by neighborhoods in the vicinity of cement factories, where there are multiple forms of air pollution – not only those producing ozone-forming emissions, but also the most dangerous kinds of particulate matter.

Resulting from this event, the Alamo Group sent a letter to the Mayor and City Council, urging them to consider not just ozone, but all major kinds of pollutants in San Antonio. Many of the sources of ozone are also sources of other major types of pollution, like toxic gasses and fine particulate matter, so controlling emissions of all kinds from those sources will have a bigger impact than just reducing ozone-producing emissions. An effective action plan requires a better understanding of how all kinds air pollution, in combination or separately, are harming those who live here.

Imagine: children being able to play outdoors without suffering asthma attacks, elderly couples being able to stroll in a city park without risk of pollution-triggered heart attacks, and no neighborhood in the whole city any sicker than others due to the location of highways or polluting factories! It is a vision worth the effort to achieve.

Meredith McGuire, Alamo Group Conservation Committee Co-chair

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 Loyd Cortez** and we'll add your name to our growing list of environmental activists.

Sierra Club Inner City Outings (ICO)

Inner City Outings is a key initiative for Sierra Club Groups across the country. Here is the program goals statement from the club's [ICO web page](#):

- Actively engage people in the outdoors through outdoor activities, including backpacking, car camping, canoeing, kayaking, hiking, rafting, service projects, skating, skiing, sledding, etc.;
- Promote appreciation and protection of the natural environment through outdoor adventures and environmental education;
- Create opportunities through outdoor experiences for personal growth and life style change, outdoor skills and leadership development; and
- foster respect of self, others, and the environment.

Alamo Group's ICO events

Check out our ICO web page. Here you will find the schedule for meetings and how to sign up if you wish to help. We hope you will join us!



Kids from San Antonio Eastside Boys and Girls Clubs on an ICO hike at Friedrich Park February 8th. We also made "seed bombs" -- balls of clay, mulch and flower seeds for the kids to hurl onto unsightly spots in their neighborhoods for the spring/summer bloom.



Boys from SATX Inner City Development enjoying s'mores
after a November 2nd ICO hike at Eisenhower park

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.