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THE 4CP NEWSLETTER

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REPORT FROM PARIS

(Guest writer Richard Whiteford provides a report from the Paris climate talks which he attended as a delegate.)

In December of 2015, 195 nations participated in the COP-21 climate summit in Paris. They came with a positive spirit of achieving an agreement to address the most urgent and enormous threat humanity has ever faced.

Prior to the conference, it had been widely agreed that the maximum temperature increase we could allow above preindustrial levels was 2° Celsius (about 3.6° Fahrenheit). This agreement was predominately promoted by politicians and delegates, not necessarily by scientists. And Island nations have long argued that the 2° C goal consigns them to oblivion from sea level rise.

Even accepting a 2° C goal, we can only afford to burn around 800 billion tons more of carbon to stay within that boundary; however, there are 2,795 billion tons of carbon inventoried for consumption right now.

In Paris on Friday, December 10th, when it was obvious to the climate scientists that the political delegates were intent on staying with the 2° C target, several of the scientists including Dr. Kevin Anderson of the Tyndall Center in London confiscated a conference room that was booked to another group and held a protest news conference. They emphasized the magnitude and urgency of climate change and demanded that the target level be reduced to 1.5° C, and expressed that even that is dangerous. They emphatically stressed that the Paris Agreement, as it stands, is far too weak to meaningfully address climate change in any serious way.

The outcome of the conference:

- 1.5° C will be the aspirational target.
- Nations must meet every 5 years to assess their carbon reduction pledges and to increase those reduction pledges during each successive 5-year period.
- The carbon reduction pledges at COP-21 fall far short of what is needed to stabilize the climate.
- Creation of a Green Climate Fund – developed countries pledged to contribute \$100 billion by 2020 to finance climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts in developing countries. So far the US has pledged \$800 million. President Obama's pledge can only be fulfilled if two thirds of Congress approves it and will depend on who our next president is.

Yes, nations rejoiced that 195 nations signed the climate agreement but the agreement is not legally binding. It relies on “name and shame” global peer pressure. Political change in any of the nations, especially the US, can undermine the agreement.

A worrisome harbinger to the strength of the United States’ commitment to the Paris Agreement -- the US Senate had an exhibition booth at the summit and gave out brochures saying that “it doesn’t matter what President Obama agrees to, Congress has the last say.”

MASSIVE METHANE LEAK

A massive leak in California is still releasing huge amounts of methane into the environment months after it began. Over 80,000 tons have escaped from a Southern California Gas Company’s well since October 2015.

The leak has prompted concerns for the environment and public health, leading to school closures, evacuation of the Porter Ranch neighborhood, and prompting the FAA to create a no-fly zone over the area, presumably so that engine sparks don’t combust in the highly flammable methane.

The gas company’s prime focus now, after other failed capping attempts, is drilling a relief well, a process that takes months. It’s the climate equivalent of the BP disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.

The methane and other pollutants spewing from the



Aerial view of the Aliso Canyon gas leak. Photo © Earthworks, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

well are invisible to the naked eye, making it hard to comprehend just how large the leak is. To put things in perspective:

- To match the leak would require cows in 13,107 average US dairy farms burping for a year (Cows are a ruminant animal that belch methane as a byproduct of digestion. They produce as much as 23% of all the methane emissions in the U.S.)
- A car would have to drive about 16 million miles, or circle the earth 648 times.

“In a way, without fire and brimstone, this is a natural disaster,” says Yitz Dekel, a displaced resident of a suburban Los Angeles retirement community. “A technological failure and natural disaster.”

But as Dekel and others argue, the Porter Ranch leak hasn’t caused an international media sensation, because there is no lava or giant waves, but mainly a colorless gas that’s upended thousands of lives.

“This is a mini-Chernobyl,” Mike Antonovich, the LA county supervisor, told a public hearing recently.

~SOURCE

SOLAR UNDER ATTACK

2015 was the best year yet for solar power in the U.S., with a booming market in rooftop installations. But as more homeowners produce their own power, electric utilities and fossil fuel interests are teaming up to slow the advance of renewables through fees, rate reductions and attacks on state renewable energy mandates.

Among the states that are encouraging rooftop solar, California and Georgia stand out. By contrast, the Public Utility Commission of Nevada passed regulatory changes last year that took effect in January to reduce net metering rates and increase fees. Net metering is the system by which solar customers sell excess power back to the utility grid. The combination of reduced payment rates and increased fees are enough to negate any savings potential for customers. Solar installation businesses in Nevada such as SolarCity have already shuttered operations as demand dropped.

In California, solar panel owners potentially pay zero for their electricity bills or very little depending on the amount of energy they sell back to the utility. Pacific Gas & Electric, which has seen a significant decline in revenue, advocates for fees on solar customers. A vice president states, “It’s going to be a

challenge for the utility. To handle that, today's electric grid needs an upgrade. To build it, everyone's going to have to contribute... we think solar customers need to contribute to that."

A solar industry spokesperson responded that "What rooftop solar represents is the first true form of competition." He does not expect California will move in the direction of new fees since California has big goals for renewable energy. "Whatever California regulators decide, the precedent set here could spread nationwide."

Arizona recently began charging its solar customers a \$50 monthly fee. Per the industry, there was a 95% drop in solar applications.

Georgia Power, that state's biggest utility, is slowly embracing the rooftop solar business, and directly performing installations. While solar currently accounts for only about 1% of energy generated in the state, the approach of Georgia Power bodes well for solar's future

~SOURCE 1, 2

WIND & SOLAR TAX CREDITS EXTENDED

Although the U.S. has become the largest oil producer in the world, topping even Saudi Arabia, it is still the largest single country importer (the EU imports more). Nevertheless, U.S. oil producers have been chomping at the bit to begin exporting oil which can command higher prices on the world market. This wish was granted in December 2015 when Congress passed a spending bill that lifted the 40 year old ban on oil exports. In exchange, opponents of lifting the ban got tax credits extended for wind and solar projects for 5 years.

~SOURCE

SAN DIEGO COMMITS TO 100% RENEWABLES

The eighth largest city in the U.S. followed up the Paris Climate Talks with legislation requiring a transition to 100% renewables for electricity by 2030. That alone would reduce city emissions by 50%. Transitioning the city's vehicle fleet to electric and recycling methane generated by the sewage and water treatment plants would altogether save some 7 million metric tons of greenhouse gases – a good start on state level goals. Other cities have pledged a transition to renewable energy, but San Diego's legally binding ordinance takes it to another level. ~SOURCE

CHINA PUTS MORATORIUM ON NEW COAL MINES

The largest producer and user of coal in the world announced in January that it would not approve any new coal mines for the next 3 years. China made significant commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a joint announcement with President Obama in late 2014, and again at the Paris climate talks in December 2015.

Pollution has become a major political issue, with one study estimating that 17% of all deaths in China are directly linked to poor air quality. During recent "red alert" air pollution days in Beijing, residents were advised to stay in their homes. ~SOURCE



Coal mines surrounding the town of Jingping, Shanxi Province China. Photo © Planet Labs, Inc., courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

EFFICIENCY STANDARDS ANNOUNCED

New efficiency standards announced by the Energy Department in late 2015 are expected to save U.S. businesses \$167 billion in energy bills, and to reduce carbon emissions by 885 million metric tons over 30 years.

The standards are for commercial air conditioning and heating equipment, and according to DoE were developed in collaboration with utilities and businesses. They will be implemented in two phases:

the first phase requires a 13% efficiency improvement as of 2018; the second an additional 15% improvement as of 2023.

During the Obama presidency DoE has finalized new standards for many commercial and consumer products such as refrigeration, electric motors and lighting. Added together they are projected to save consumers \$535 billion in energy costs and to reduce emissions more than 2 billion metric tons by 2030.

~SOURCE

NEW CCL CHAPTER IN CHESTER COUNTY

A Chester County chapter of Citizens' Climate Lobby (CCL) officially kicked off in early February with a three hour training session in Berwyn. Citizens' Climate Lobby is a non-profit, non-partisan, grassroots advocacy organization focused on national policies to address climate change, with chapters in most U.S. congressional districts. According to CCL "Politicians don't create political will, they respond to it. We believe citizens who are well-trained, organized by Congressional district and with a good system of support can more than influence the political process." See the Events of Note section below for details of a talk by renowned climate scientist and CCL Advisory Board member Dr. James Hansen.

You can find out more about Citizens' Climate Lobby at this [website](#), or sign up to join the Chester County group [here](#).

EVENTS OF NOTE

4CP SPEAKER SERIES: The monthly speaker series is held the second Wednesday of the month, at 7 p.m., in Room 240 at the West Chester Borough Building.

- **March 9, 2016** – Richard Whiteford attended the Paris climate talks in December 2015. He will give us the inside story about the talks, the optimism, the protests, the resulting agreement and expectations for compliance.

- **March 4, 2014** – Dr. James Hansen, Adjunct Professor at Columbia University's Earth Institute, where he directs a program in **Climate Science, Awareness and Solutions**, and former Director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies will give a talk titled *Climate change and energy: How can justice be achieved for young people and nature?* as the opening keynote of a regional Citizens' Climate Lobby conference. To register for Dr. Hansen's Friday evening talk or the whole conference, go to this [link](#).

- **Feb 2016 Speaker Series (Recap):** Presentation by Caitlin Cleaver, Director of Science & Research, and Phoebe Jekielek, Outreach Coordinator, at the Hurricane Island Center for Science and Leadership in the Gulf of Maine. Ms. Cleaver discussed how climate change is affecting commercial fisheries with implications for coastal economies and management decisions. Ms. Jekielek spoke about initiatives underway at the Center to build resilience in coastal communities, and to increase understanding of the effects of climate change.

- **Jan 2016 Speaker Series (Recap):** A showing of the film *Merchants of Doubt*. It is based on a 2010 book by the same name written by Naomi Oreskes who teaches the history of science at Harvard, and Erik Conway, a historian at Cal Tech. The film examines the network of industry front groups and non-science spokespersons who routinely show up to cast doubt on the science behind climate change, using the same techniques and even some of the same people who created "debate" around the health impacts of smoking.



CCL 2015 Lobby Conference, Wash. D.C.