

August 2010 Austin PSR Monthly Update

Up to 231 having joined our email list! People are interested.

***Countdown to Zero* – Ongoing News**

We are a month out after our free screening and post-film discussion of the documentary *Countdown to Zero*, about the global nuclear weapon threat that still faces us. Dr. Elliot Trester spoke and moderated an audience discussion immediately after the Friday, July 30, 7:40 PM screening with about 50 of the 70 people who came to the film. A smaller number retired to Manuel's restaurant next door and continued a discussion about nuclear non-proliferation, and about 10 people signed up to receive these updates and continue to hear about PSR's nuclear non-proliferation and other activities.

On the topic of nuclear non-proliferation, there is a lot of effort focused right on now on reaching key senators (not the Texas ones) who are involved in sending the non-proliferation treaties through the Senate for ratification. The treaties are in danger of falling prey to the political machinations of the November elections. If you have colleagues in other states that might be interested in this topic and willing to make some phone calls to those key senators, you could let them know that now is the time to do so. For more specifics, go to the PSR local or national websites for details (www.psr.org).

PSR may continue to do this work of calling attention to our nuclear weapons policy, and to the related policy on nuclear power, as they are closely linked. If you are interested in participating in these efforts, please contact Marian Morris, Austin chapter director, at mmorris@psr.org.

Organizing Health Professionals Around State on TCEQ Sunset Review and Upcoming Legislative Session

Austin PSR in partnership with other organizations is mobilizing doctors and other health professionals across Texas to have input on the upcoming 2011 Texas Legislative Session to promote clean air, water and soil in Texas. We will be looking for Texas medical professionals from Dallas, Houston, Austin, San Antonio, El Paso and the Coastal Bend areas who are interested in working on clean environment issues in Texas. The goals of this working group would be:

1. To unite the efforts of the medical communities who are active in Texas for Clean Air, Water, and Soil;
2. To organize input for before and during the Legislature next Spring; and
3. To influence positive policy changes for cleaner air, water and soil in Texas.

If you are interested in being involved with this effort, or know of colleagues in other areas who would be interested, please connect us up! You can start by contacting Marian Morris at mmorris@psr.org.

Latest on Coal – EPA Hearing on Proposed Coal Ash Regulation, Wednesday Sept. 8, Dallas

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is holding a hearing in Dallas all day on Wednesday, September 8 (one week from today!), on the topic of regulating the management of coal ash, a waste byproduct of coal-fired power plants. Coal ash, which contains heavy metals linked to neurological damage in humans, among other ill effects, is less regulated than household garbage, and there is a lot of it spread across Texas, possibly seeping into groundwater that eventually makes its way into us. Austin PSR has contacted colleagues in Dallas who have signed up to testify on the harmful effects of coal ash and ask for regulation by the federal government of its management. To know more about this issue, there are some very useful, concise-but-thorough fact sheets on coal ash at the national PSR website, <http://www.psr.org/environment-and-health/code-black/coal-ash-toxic-and-leaking.html>. And, of course, if you would like to get involved with PSR's efforts on this issue, please contact Marian at mmorris@psr.org.

Austin Climate Protection Program

The City of Austin/Austin Energy Climate Protection Program is meeting to work on creating resources for citizens to turn to when they want to take personal action to preserve a healthy environment and stop human-caused climate change. For more information on this program, go to <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/acpp/acpp.htm>. Austin PSR board members will be attending meetings and working to inform and support the process with a health promotion sensibility.

Sunset Review of Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ)

December 15 is the day TCEQ undergoes its sunset review process at the Texas Capitol building. Mark your calendars! Austin PSR is a coalition partner in Alliance for a Clean Texas (ACT), which is organizing to give input on the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) sunset review process that will be happening in the 2011 legislative session.

Austin PSR will continue to support the efforts of ACT in reforming this agency so that it can wield its intended potential of keeping air, soil and water clean and safe for Texas citizens. For more information, go to <http://allianceforcleantexas.org/>.

University Receives \$19 Million To Monitor Carbon Storage Project

The University of Texas at Austin Jackson School of Geosciences has received funding from the US Department of Energy and NRG Energy to work on the developing technology of carbon dioxide sequestration at coal-fired power plants. Many activists working on decreasing our reliance on coal for energy are dubious about whether efforts like these can be effective, as well as be a safe and viable financial alternative to developing other forms of energy generation. Either way, here is a chance to read about the project: <http://www.jsq.utexas.edu/news/rels/062810.html?AddInterest=1285>

There is some controversy about whether carbon sequestration is a viable technology, and there are PSR members who have serious concerns about the potential human health impact of using carbon sequestration. National PSR has an article posted here: <http://www.psr.org/news-events/news-archive/capitol-hill-loves-carbon-storage.html> – so it looks like, even though the jury might still be out on whether this is safe, folks near Houston will have a close-up chance to see what this is all about.

Upcoming Events

October 21-22: Children’s Environmental Health Institute’s (CEHI) annual conference, “Prenatal and Early Life Exposures”, Houston – <http://cehi.org>

October 24: Austin PSR board meeting, 3-5 PM

December 15: TCEQ Sunset Review hearing at the Capitol