
". . . after the levees broke, we watched every single system associated with the life of a city fail: the electric grid, the water system, the sewer system, the transportation system, the telephone system, the police force, the fire department, the hospitals . . . society and nature were co-conspirators in the tragedy." -- Nicholas Lemann, The New Yorker, Sept 12, 2005

***** Sustainable Tompkins News *****

INVITATION TO SUSTAINABLE TOMPKINS MEETING

The September gathering of the Sustainable Tompkins Coordinating Council is a "bring a friend" meeting and potluck dinner. All are welcome to join in the discussion of how to continue to build community awareness of sustainability. Meet like-minded people, share your ideas, learn from one another. The council and friends will meet 6:00 to 8:30 pm, Thursday, Sept 15 at Cooperative Extension, 615 Willow Ave., Ithaca. For more information, contact Steve Nicholson, 607-539-6923, scnfish@clarityconnect.com.

OCTOBER MASTER CLASS -- PETER BERG ON BIOREGIONS

Gay Nicholson, program coordinator for Sustainable Tompkins, has lined up another series of master classes for the fall, starting with a talk by Peter Berg. An originator of the concept of bioregions, Berg helped found the Planet Drum Foundation in 1973 to advance bioregionalism in North America and beyond. A bioregion is "a geographic area defined by natural characteristics, including watersheds, landforms, soils, geological qualities, native plants and animals, climate, and weather" explains Berg -- but the significance of a bioregion reaches beyond its natural elements. Recognizing one's role as an inhabitant of a bioregion often leads to a deeper sense of place and stewardship. "A bioregion is a geographic terrain and a terrain of consciousness," says Berg. "Put simply, a bioregion is a 'life-place,' the natural place around you that's alive and contains your life as well as the lives of other species." The title of Berg's talk is "The Bioregional Basis of Urban Sustainability." (For more on Berg and bioregions, visit www.planetdrum.org.) Judy Goldhaft will open the evening with "Water Web" -- a short words-and-movement performance celebrating water and our complex relationship to it. Poet and ecophilosopher Gary Snyder has called Water Web "a unique dance which delights and instructs, and takes down the arbitrary boundary between art and information." The event is scheduled for 6:30 - 9:00 pm, Thursday, October 13, in the Women's Community Building auditorium. To register, e-mail Gay Nicholson, gaynicholson@aol.com.

ST JOINS OUTDOOR EDUCATORS

Sustainable Tompkins will be part of a "sustainability fair" featured at the 38th annual conference of the New York State Outdoor Education Association, a professional group that supports outdoor education, an appreciation of nature, and stewardship of the environment. The conference, based at the Clarion University Hotel in Ithaca October 6 - 9, features speakers, presentations, and dozens of field trips and workshops -- from a tour of Montezuma Wetlands to a how-to on making biodiesel. For more information on the group and the conference, contact Nicole and Frank Benenati at 607-533-3597, or visit www.nysoea.org.

"AMERICA RECYCLES" EVENTS

For the second year in a row, Sustainable Tompkins will join the America Recycles event at Pyramid Mall, Saturday, November 12. It's a fun, interactive event that reaches a broad audience. To participate or volunteer, contact organizer Lauren Minis, LMinis@kaxy.com, an Ithaca College senior working with the County Solid Waste Division.

SUSTAINABILITY MAKEOVERS FOR BUSINESS

Sustainable Tompkins is partnering with the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce and the County Solid Waste Division to present a half-day conference on sustainability for businesses. Attendees will learn about saving money and reducing waste through smart power management, better building performance, and managing the flow of resources to reduce waste. Other topics will include how to find healthier, more environmentally responsible office and cleaning supplies. "Business managers are quickly discovering that gains in productivity, safety, worker satisfaction, and public relations often accompany the redesign of workspaces and activities to be more energy conserving, waste conscious, and environmentally friendly," says organizer Gay Nicholson. Information will also be offered about government programs that assist businesses in making energy efficiency improvements. The "Sustainability Makeover" Business Workshop will run from 8:00 - 11:00 a.m. Tuesday, November 15 at the Women's Community Building in downtown Ithaca. There's a \$15 fee. Registration is through the Chamber of Commerce, 607-273-7080.

INFORMATION RESOURCE -- ST LIST SERVE

For a wealth of references to articles, websites, and announcements of events as well as a forum for questions and discussions about sustainability and related topics, join the Sustainable Tompkins list serve. It's free and self-regulated. To subscribe, send an e-mail to SustainableTompkins-subscribe@topica.com or visit

<http://lists.topica.com/lists/SustainableTompkins> .Once you are subscribed, you can send messages to all other subscribers at SustainableTompkins@topica.com. To remove yourself from the list, simply send an e-mail to SustainableTompkins-unsubscribe@topica.com. The list is configured to accept and distribute attachments up to 100KB in size. All subscribers should be vigilant about having anti-virus software installed before sending or opening attachments.

***** Area Events and Sustainability News *****

TOWN-GOWN PARTNERSHIPS WORK FOR DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENTS

From the Ithaca Downtown Partnership: "The IDP has created a Community Forum Series that features a series of speakers addressing topics pertaining to Downtown Ithaca and its relationship to surrounding areas. The second presentation will be held Thursday, September 15th at 7:00pm at the new downtown Hilton Garden Inn. The second forum session will examine the ways in which universities and communities can work together to better their downtowns. Representatives from Colgate University and the village of Hamilton will present information on the 'Hamilton Initiative,' a unique partnership for downtown revitalization. This idea exchange is designed to help elected officials, community leaders and the general public to better understand issues that effect downtown, and to provide an opportunity for community dialogue." Light refreshments will be provided, and the forum is free and open to the public. For more information: www.downtownithaca.com

DRIVER ED FOR BICYCLISTS

Ride Now! bike classes, taught by certified instructors Susan Powell and Lois Chaplin, are designed for both experienced and less confident adult or late teenage cyclists who want to learn more about handling their bikes and navigating safely through city streets or on trails. STCC member Maura says, "I learned to brake suddenly without flying head over heels over the handlebars, and how to keep my bike wheels steady in a tiny space -- such as between moving traffic and parked cars along the side of the road. It was a very worthwhile class." Come to a preview session on either Wednesday, Sept. 14, 11 am - 2 pm or Thursday, Sept.15, 4 - 7 pm. Each of these preview sessions doubles as a stand-alone class or the first of three sessions in a full course culminating in a certificate. For location, sliding fee scale, and other info, contact Jennifer Dotson, 273-3540, jennifer@kitchenchairmusic.com, or Lois Chaplin, 255-2498, lec4@cornell.edu .

"FUTURE OF FOOD" SHOWN AT CORNELL

"The Future of Food," a documentary by Deborah Koons Garcia (Jerry Garcia's widow) on the effects of genetically modified foods on farmers, biodiversity, and health will be shown at Cornell. The screening will be followed by a panel discussion with Garcia, Ignacio Chapela, Matthew Dillon, and a CU researcher/pro-biotech rep. The film will be shown Saturday, Sept 17, at 7 pm at CU's Willard Straight Hall. The event is free and open to all.

CORNELL'S ENTRY IN THE SOLAR DECATHLON IS READY TO GO

The all-solar house built by a team of Cornell students is ready for transportation to the national Solar Decathlon competition in Washington, DC. The students will join 17 other college and university teams in setting up their houses in a "solar village" on the National Mall and proving that they are fully functional. The event is open to the public October 7 – 16. For a preview of the house and info on the contest, visit <http://cusd.cornell.edu/> . Coinciding with the Decathlon is the SOLAR POWER 2005 conference in DC October 5 – 9. Find out more at www.solarpowerconference.com .

BUY AN "ITHACA IS SUNNY" T-SHIRT and help support students going to the Solar Decathlon. They're \$10 each and come in all sizes and three colors. Contact Alexandra Hollinger, Cornell's sustainability intern, 255-2757, sustainability@cornell.edu .

***** Featured Article *****

TOO MANY PEOPLE IN NATURE'S WAY

Experts Say: 'We Think We're Safe and We're Not'

September 05, 2005 — By Charles J. Hanley, Associated Press

The dead and the desperate of New Orleans now join the farmers of Aceh and the fishermen of Trincomalee, villagers in Iran and the slum dwellers of Haiti in a world being dealt ever more punishing blows by natural disasters. It's a world where Americans can learn from even the poorest nations, experts say, and where they should learn not to build future settlements like the drowned old metropolis on the Mississippi.

The levees in New Orleans inspired a false sense of security, says Dennis S. Miletti, a leading scholar on disaster prevention. "We rely on technology and we end up thinking as human beings that we're totally safe, and we're not," said Miletti, of the University of Colorado. "The bottom line is we have a very unsafe planet."

By one critical measure, the impact on populations, statistics show the planet to be increasingly unsafe. More than 2.5 billion people were affected by floods, earthquakes, hurricanes and other natural disasters between 1994 and 2003, a 60 percent increase over the previous two 10-year periods, U.N. officials reported at a conference on disaster prevention in January. Those numbers don't include millions displaced by last December's tsunami, which killed an estimated 180,000 people as its monstrous waves swept over coastlines from Indonesia's Aceh province to Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, and beyond.

By another measure -- property damage -- 2004 was the costliest year on record for global insurers, who paid out more than \$40 billion on natural disasters, reports German insurance giant Munich Re. Florida's quartet of 2004 hurricanes was the big factor.

But generally it's not that more "events" are happening, rather that more people are in the way, said Thomas Loster, a Munich Re expert. "More and more people are being hit," he said. In the 1970s, only 11 percent of earthquakes affected human settlements, researchers at Belgium's University of Louvain report. That soared to 31 percent in 1993-2003, including a quake in 2003 that killed 26,000 people in Iran, whose population has doubled since the '70s.

The expanding U.S. population "has migrated to hazard-prone areas -- to Florida, the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, particularly barrier islands, to California," noted retired U.S. government seismologist Robert M. Hamilton, a disaster-prevention specialist. "Several decades ago we didn't have wall-to-wall houses down the coast as we do now."

The way America builds too often invites disasters, experts say -- by draining Florida swampland and bulldozing California hillsides, for example, disrupting natural runoff and magnifying flood hazards. "We're building our communities in ways that aren't compatible with the natural perils we have," Miletti said.

The more advanced the nations, the bigger the blow may be. Terry Jeggle, a U.N. disaster-reduction planner, cites the New Orleans levee system -- dependent on pumps that run on electricity produced by fuel that must be transported in. One failure will lead to another along that chain. "Complex systems invite compounding of complexity in consequences, too," said the Geneva-based Jeggle.

Experts fear more is to come. The scientific consensus expects global warming to intensify storms, floods, heat waves and drought. Climatologists are still researching whether climate change has already strengthened hurricanes, whose energy is drawn from warm ocean waters, or whether the Atlantic Basin and Gulf are witnessing only a cyclical upsurge in intense storms. Computer models of climate change in the decades to come point to more devastating Category 5 storms.

The prospect of more vulnerable populations on a more turbulent Earth has U.N. officials and other advocates pressuring governments to plan and prepare. They cite examples of poorer nations that in ways do a better job than the rich:

--No one was reported killed when Ivan struck Cuba in 2004, its worst hurricane in 50 years and a storm that, after weakening, killed 25 people in the United States. Cuba's warning-evacuation system is minutely planned, even down to neighborhood workers keeping updated charts on which residents need help during evacuations.

--Along Bangladesh's cyclone coast, 33,000 well-organized volunteers stand ready to shepherd neighbors to raised concrete shelters at the approach of one of the Bay of Bengal's vicious storms.

--In 2002, Jamaica conducted a full-scale evacuation rehearsal in a low-lying suburb of coastal Kingston, and fine-tuned plans afterward. When Ivan's 20-foot surge destroyed hundreds of homes two years later, only eight people died. Ordinary Jamaicans also are taught search-and-rescue methods and towns at risk have trained flood-alert teams.

Like many around the world, Barbara Carby, Jamaica's disaster coordinator, watched in disbelief as catastrophe unfolded on the U.S. Gulf Coast. "We always have resource constraints," she said. "That's not a problem the U.S. has. But because they have the resources, they may not pay enough attention to preparedness and awareness, and to educating the public how to help themselves."

Source: Associated Press

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