News and resources to inspire concerned citizens to work together in building a healthier, stronger society that benefits all.

Resilient Communities

Volunteerism Remains Strong in America

More than 60 million Americans volunteered 8 billion hours of their services in 2010, holding steady with the previous year, according to the latest report by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), released late last year. Communities are benefiting from their work in mentoring and tutoring youth, fundraising and providing food, transportation and general labor, including disaster relief.

"Every day, volunteers of all ages are giving their time and talents to solve problems and make our country stronger," says Robert Velasco II, acting CEO of CNCS. He observes that civic involvement increases as people become more deeply rooted in their communities through family, work and school ties.

The members of Generation X (born 1965 to 1981) are volunteer stars, having contributed 2.3 billion hours in 2010, 110 million more than the year before. Teen volunteer rates were also up from 2002 through 2010, compared to 1989. A *Volunteering in America* report attributes this to emphasis on service-learning in high schools, the influence of parents that volunteer, social networking and the ease of finding opportunities via the Internet.

To find local volunteer opportunities by category, visit Serve.gov or AllForGood.org.

Large cities with the highest volunteer rates are Minneapolis-St. Paul (37.1 percent), Portland, Oregon (36.2), Salt Lake City, Utah (34.1), Seattle, Washington (33.9), and Rochester, New York (33.8). Among mid-sized cities, Boulder (44.8) and Fort Collins (42.2), Colorado, ranked in the top five.

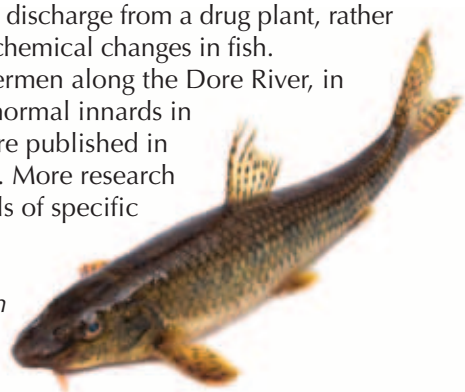
Fishy Business

Something's Spawning Gender-Bent Fish

A French study examining wild gudgeon fish that live directly downstream from a pharmaceutical drug manufacturing plant found that up to 80 percent of them exhibited both male and female traits in their sex organs. Such sex abnormalities indicate endocrine disruption that can foreshadow larger effects on fish populations because of reductions in breeding abilities. Upstream of the plant, only 5 percent of such intersex fish were detected.

Excreted pharmaceuticals can enter the environment from sewage treatment plants or the flushing of unwanted or old drugs down the toilet. They also can directly enter waterways via discharge into rivers and streams by drug manufacturing plants. The study is the first to link discharge from a drug plant, rather than a sewage plant, with physical and chemical changes in fish.

The inquiry was initiated after fishermen along the Dore River, in France, noticed swollen bellies and abnormal innards in the wild gudgeon fish. Study results were published in the journal *Environmental International*. More research is needed to identify the types and levels of specific drugs in the water at each site.



Source: EnvironmentalHealthNews.com

Going Out Green

New Mortuary Practices Reduce Mercury Pollution

Resomation, Ltd., in Glasgow, Scotland, has invented a new alkaline hydrolysis unit as a green alternative to cremation. Founder Sandy Sullivan plans to install the first one in America at the Anderson-McQueen Funeral Home, in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Mercury from dental fillings vaporized in crematoria has been blamed for up to 16 percent of British airborne mercury emissions, and many facilities there are fitting costly mercury filtration systems to meet reduced emission targets.

The device dissolves the body in heated, pressurized, alkaline water. Makers claim the process produces one-third less greenhouse gas than cremation, uses one-seventh of the energy and allows for complete separation of mercury-laden dental amalgam for safe disposal.

Sullivan, a biochemist, says tests have proven the effluent is sterile, contains no DNA and poses no environmental risk. He believes it can rival cremation for cost. The technology has been legalized in seven states to date.

Another green alternative, Promession, is under development by Swedish Biologist Susanne Wiigh-Masak. It involves a fully automated machine that removes the body from the coffin and freezes it with liquid nitrogen. Vibrating breaks the corpse into fragments, which are then dried, refined and filtered to remove dental amalgam and other metals. The remains are then automatically poured into a biodegradable container for shallow burial.

Wiigh-Masak likens the process to composting, in which organic materials convert to soil within weeks. She says that 60 countries around the world have expressed interest in the technology.

Source: BBC News

Future Fuels

U.S. Renewable Energy Surpasses Nuclear

Beginning in 2011, renewable energy production in the United States surpassed nuclear production in overall quantity and percentage. As a percentage of total U.S. energy generation, renewables are steadily, if modestly, gaining. California's leadership goal targets the utilization of 33 percent renewable energy sources by 2020.

Hydroelectric, geothermal, solar/photovoltaic, wind and biomass combined make up a growing segment of the mix: 11.7 percent as of June 2011, surpassing nuclear at 11.1 percent. For the same period in 2010, nuclear was 11.6 percent, and renewable was 10.6, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Forbes reports that many environmentalists, however, think that the two prominent technologies that currently make up much of the renewables sector—hydroelectric power, at 35 percent, and biomass, at 48 percent—are the least attractive. (Wind is the third-largest, at 13 percent of renewable, 1.5 percent of the total.) Large-scale hydroelectric power production has harmful impacts on river ecosystems and has become less popular in the developed world. As for biomass, each of the many types of feedstock must be evaluated individually for its emissions profile, water footprint and other considerations, such as whether farm fields or forests need that material to decompose in place in order to retain soil or ecosystem function.

Rocky Topping

Appalachian Residents Oppose Coal Mining Policies

Even though coal mining forms the economic backbone of several Appalachian states, a recent poll reveals overwhelming local resistance to the technique of removing the entire tops of mountains to secure the coal, and then dumping the toxic remains in valleys and streams. Residents are mad enough to make it an election issue.

A survey of 1,315 registered voters, sponsored by Earthjustice, Appalachian Mountain Advocates and the Sierra Club, was conducted by independent research companies in Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee and West Virginia. It found that only 20 percent of residents support the practice of mountaintop removal. More, voters from all parties in these states promise to penalize elected officials that move to weaken clean water and environmental regulations related to such mining.

The poll reveals intense and broad-based support in the heart of Appalachia for fully enforcing and even increasing clean water protections to combat the negative impacts of mountaintop removal mining. Joan Mulhern, senior legislative counsel for Earthjustice, says, "The time for this destructive practice is over. The people in Appalachia are making it clear that they recognize the threats to their health and communities."

Source: Earthjustice.org, find state action contacts at Tinyurl.com/3jnlum5.