



Group Against Smog and Pollution, Inc. Hotline



Summer 2013

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Group Against Smog and Pollution, Inc. (GASP) is a nonprofit citizens group in southwestern Pennsylvania working for a healthy, sustainable environment. Founded in 1969, GASP has been a diligent watchdog, educator, litigator, and policy maker on many environmental issues, with a focus on air quality in the Pittsburgh region.

GASP Launches School Flag Program in Regent Square

by Karrie Kressler, SCA Green Cities Fellow for GASP

On Friday, May 24th, GASP and the Environmental Charter School (ECS) raised a green air quality flag, launching the first EPA School Flag Program in Southwest Pennsylvania. The program makes air conditions visible to children, one of the groups affected most by poor air quality. Children are more susceptible to air pollution than adults due to their developing bodies, large lung-to-body weight ratio, and high level of exercise.

Earlier that morning, the weather forecast called for chilly temperatures and rain. I kept my fingers crossed and hoped the clouds wouldn't douse the spirit of the day, but still, threw on some layers and a raincoat preparing for the worst. Laura Micco, one of the teachers helping to lead the program, told me that that ECS is a "rain or shine" kind of place, so the weather wasn't about to stop us.

A quick check of the air quality forecast didn't dampen our plans either. Friday was predicted to be a green day, which meant that outdoor air quality was considered satisfactory, posing little risk to public health. In this way, it was a good day for our event and a good day to be outdoors.

When the weather forecast calls for rain, we prepare with raincoats and umbrellas.



GASP staff and ECS students spoke at the School Flag launch in May.

Similarly, when the air quality forecast is for dirty air, we can protect ourselves by adjusting our activities. Yet unlike the weather, air quality is not as observable.

In fact, the smallest particle pollution, the stuff you can't see, is the most dangerous. Big particles are typically blocked by your body's natural airway filters, but smaller particles pass through and head into your lungs. Another main air pollutant, ozone, is also invisible, and highly reactive with our airway tissue.

The EPA School Flag Program is a hands-on activity that makes air quality conditions visible to schools and the community so that they can take steps, if necessary, to minimize their exposure to high levels of air pollution.

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School Flag continued from page 1


Excited and brimming with energy, I watched as the newly minted GASP Club, an ECS student group that formed to lead the School Flag Program, prepared themselves for all of the attention they were about to get. The teachers laid out the plan for the morning. Speakers recited their lines, changed a few words, and recited again. Others eagerly attached their "GASP" badges, threw on their coats, and lined up ready for the spotlight.

Outside the school, the crowd spilled onto the side street and lawn, and students held the rainbow of Air Quality Index colors surrounded by fluttering little green flags. Then, we all took a deep breath and cheered loudly as the green flag was hoisted up in front of the school, signaling good-to-go air quality and just the beginning of a program GASP hopes to see at other schools soon.

Students in the GASP Club at ECS will check the air quality forecast daily, and raise a flag that corresponds to the Air Quality Index (AQI), which measures the amount of pollution in the air. After observing the flag color, school personnel can take actions if necessary to protect the health of their students. Having an alternative indoor activity, shortening practices, having an asthma action plan, or decreasing the amount of deep breathing during activity are all actions that can be considered during days of high air pollution.

The daily air quality forecast for ambient air will not necessarily inform schools of point source air pollution. The program encourages schools to choose exercise areas away from busy streets, idling vehicles, or other sources of air pollution.

Friday's event was the first step in raising awareness. Local media covered the launch of the program as well. Please visit the GASP website to read up on this event's local news coverage.

Next school year, GASP will take the program to many additional sites throughout the region. If your school or organization is interested in starting its own flag program, please contact Karrie Kressler at schoolflag@gasp-pgh.org. 

Air Quality Index Outdoor Activity Guidance for Schools

Numbers in parentheses are the AQI Values.

(0-50) GREEN - "GOOD"

Air quality is considered satisfactory, and air pollution poses little or no risk. It's a great day to be active outside!

(51-100) YELLOW - "MODERATE"

Air quality is acceptable; however, for some pollutants there may be a moderate health concern for a small number of people who are sensitive to air pollution. In general, it's still a good day to be active outside. Students who are sensitive to air pollution could have symptoms, so watch for coughing or shortness of breath. These are signs to take it easier.

(101-150) ORANGE - "UNHEALTHY FOR SENSITIVE GROUPS"

It's OK for students to be active outside, especially for short activities such as recess and physical education (PE) class. For longer activities such as athletic practice, students should take more breaks and do less intense activities. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. Again, students with asthma are likely to be affected and should follow their asthma action plans and keep their quick relief medicine handy.

(151-200) RED - "UNHEALTHY"

Everyone may begin to experience health effects, and members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects. For all outdoor activities, students should take more breaks and do less intense activities. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. Consider moving activities indoors or rescheduling. Students with asthma should follow their asthma action plans and keep their quick relief medicine handy.

(201-300) PURPLE - "VERY UNHEALTHY"

Health alert: everyone may experience more serious health effects. Move all activities indoors or reschedule to another day.

The AQI Guidance chart was developed by the EPA and CDC.

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GASP
5135 Penn Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15224

(412) 924-0604

www.gasp-pgh.org
info@gasp-pgh.org



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GASP Mission Statement

GASP will act to obtain for the residents of southwestern Pennsylvania clean air, water, and land in order to create the healthy, sustainable environment and quality of life to which we are entitled.

Methods of Achieving Mission

GASP is a citizens' group based in Southwestern PA which focuses on Allegheny County environmental issues. When pertinent to these concerns, we participate in state and national environmental decisions.

We believe in the public's right to receive accurate and thorough information on these issues and to actively participate in the decision making process.

To achieve our environmental goals on behalf of our membership, GASP will advocate, educate, serve as an environmental watchdog, mobilize action, and litigate when necessary.

We will work both independently and in cooperation with like-minded individuals and groups as determined by the Board of Directors.

We will uphold GASP's reputation for scientific integrity, honesty, and responsible involvement.

Pittsburgh Air is Improving, But We Still Have Work to Do

The following is a joint press statement issued by GASP, Clean Air Task Force, Clean Water Action, Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future, Sierra Club, and Sustainable Pittsburgh in response to ALA's State of the Air Report.

In April, the American Lung Association (ALA) released its 2013 "State of the Air" report, an annual ranking of air pollution levels across the country. The report finds that over the past few years, while our region's economy was strong and population levels were increasing, air quality in the Pittsburgh metro area slowly improved. Decreases in air pollution can be attributed to many factors, including installation of new pollution-control equipment at the U.S. Steel Clairton Coke Plant, emission reductions from coal-fired power plants and the use of cleaner diesel fuel and engines.

"The fact that the region's economy has been stable and the population growing when levels of air pollution went down shows us that clean air and a strong economy go hand in hand," said Matthew Mehalik, Program Manager at Sustainable Pittsburgh. "We need more support for clean air policies that add value to the region."

Despite these improvements, the area is still only one of two metro areas outside of California to rank among the 25 most polluted cities in the country. Our area ranks as one of the top 10 most polluted cities in the nation with regard to short- and long-term particle pollution. Particle pollution is the mix of tiny solid and liquid particles in the air we breathe, which can increase the risk of heart and lung disease, adverse birth outcomes, cancer and premature death. Pittsburgh also continues to report some of the worst levels of ozone pollution, which can reduce lung function and worsen asthma.

"Though we have made incredible strides in improving the quality of our air, ALA's report reinforces that we still have work to do to reduce harmful pollution in Pittsburgh," said Tiffany Hickman, Western Pennsylvania Outreach Coordinator at PennFuture. "Bringing particle pollution down to healthier levels requires minimizing pollution from many sources, including diesel."

A key step toward cleaning up our region's air is for Pittsburgh to implement and enforce the "Clean Air Act of 2010," also known as clean construction legislation, as soon as possible. The law requires projects receiving at least \$250,000 in public subsidies to use a percentage of cleaner construction equipment. The legislation should have been implemented within six months of passing, but instead has languished in City Hall for nearly two years.

"Applying the clean construction legislation is a concrete step the City can take to safeguard the health of Pittsburgh residents," said Rachel Filippini, executive director of Group

Against Smog and Pollution. "It was recently estimated that the biggest cancer risk in Downtown Pittsburgh's air comes from diesel vehicles. Enacting this legislation will help protect the hundreds of thousands of people that work and live in Pittsburgh, while simultaneously improving regional air quality."


Diesel exhaust contains carcinogens, ozone-forming elements, particulate matter and other toxic air pollutants. These particles cause asthma attacks, heart attack, cancer, stroke, and premature death. The good news is that widely available emission controls can eliminate more than 90 percent of diesel particles from a heavy-duty truck or piece of construction equipment.

A letter signed by local environmental groups urging the mayor of Pittsburgh to implement the clean construction legislation as quickly as possible was sent today. Citizens can ask the mayor to take action now by contacting his office at 412-255-2626 or on-line at www.pittsburghpa.gov/mayor/feedback/.

"As a resident of the city of Pittsburgh, I'm glad to see our city is improving," said Hill District resident and Clean Water Action Steering Committee Member Beverly Walker. "But it's obvious we have a long way to go. I want our leaders to do all they can to make sure Pittsburgh not only continues to improve, but does so as quickly as possible."

John Graham, Senior Scientist with Clean Air Task Force, performed an independent review of PM_{2.5} levels across the nation. PM_{2.5}, a specific type of particle pollution, includes things like soot and smoke that make our air more polluted. Graham stated, "The analysis builds upon our 2011 report, *Fine Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5}) and Ozone (O₃) Air Quality in Western Pennsylvania in the 2000s*, and shows six of ten monitors in the region recorded annual PM levels for 2009-2011 that fall in the worst ten percent nationally."

"Citizens, public officials, businesses and organizations all have an important role to play in ensuring that our air quality continues to improve for the health of our residents and strength of our economy," said Rachel Martin, Senior Organizing Manager, Sierra Club.

In addition to advocating for the passage and enforcement of strong air quality regulations, citizens can minimize emissions by buying clean energy, limiting vehicle idling, refraining from burning wood and trash, and unplugging electric devices when not in use. For more ways individuals can help to reduce air pollution, visit breatheproject.org/act/individual/. 


GASP Settles Appeal of Buffalo Compressor Station Air Permit

by Lauren Burge, GASP Staff Attorney

In July 2012, GASP appealed an air permit for the Buffalo Compressor Station, located in Buffalo Township, Washington County. The Buffalo facility is owned by National Fuel Gas Supply Corporation and is a natural gas transmission station that compresses natural gas and moves it along a transmission pipeline. The facility includes two natural gas-fired turbines, two natural gas-fired compressor engines, and an emergency generator.

While reviewing the facility's draft air permit, GASP staff spotted an error in the way the company and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection had calculated Buffalo's potential greenhouse gas emissions. As a result of this mistake, greenhouse gas emissions from this facility were underestimated by roughly 10%. GASP staff pointed

this mistake out to DEP during the public comment period but the error was not corrected, so we chose to appeal the permit.

In March, GASP reached a settlement agreement with DEP and National Fuel Gas. The agreement establishes enforceable permit limits on greenhouse gas emissions and includes reporting requirements to ensure that the Buffalo facility's emissions are in fact below the greenhouse gas major source thresholds. This appeal has not only corrected this simple but significant math error at the Buffalo facility, but has also helped to ensure that the same calculation error is not made at other similar facilities and that greenhouse gas emissions are as fully accounted for as possible. 

Dr. C. Arden Pope: A Driving Force in Regulating Air Pollution

by Walter Goldberg, GASP Board Member

A half a century ago it was widely argued that air pollution is the price Pittsburghers must to pay for steel mill jobs. GASP was founded by a group who thought otherwise.

Over the years, we have had support and direct help from many scientists and economists. Amongst them were Lester Lave from Carnegie Mellon University and C. Arden Pope III from Brigham Young University. They immediately recognized that air pollution attacks lung function, but then Pope's work revealed that fine dust in the air causes heart attacks, circulatory problems, and strokes. Very fine particles go right into the bloodstream.

On March 7, Dr. Pope visited CMU and summarized his work, which started in 1986 when a strike shut down the Provo, Utah steel plant for a year. With this one plant closing, Pope saw hospital admissions for children in Provo drop by a factor of two--and little kids don't smoke.

It is hard to overestimate the importance of Pope's particularly ambitious study of the effects of air pollution in six cities. In spite of the intense efforts of industry to find flaws in that work, its conclusions stand as firm as ever. The "Six Cities Study" forms the basis of much federal effort to regulate air pollution. Arden Pope was, and remains, a major driving force.


But how do you calculate the costs versus benefits of air pollution control? That job requires the smarts of health

professionals, biologists, epidemiologists, economists and engineers.

In 2011, Pope and his associates produced a definitive estimate of the current costs and benefits of air pollution control. They calculated that fine particulate control in the US required an expenditure of \$7.3 billion per year. But the savings from the reduction of lost work time and health care costs generates a savings of \$19 billion to \$167 billion per year. A pretty good payoff!

Air pollution, like cancer and smoking, shortens the lifespan. So do being poor and a slew of other factors. Taking them into account (which isn't easy), does dust in the air measurably shorten your life?

To find out, Pope and colleagues compared death rates in 1980 and in 2000. Their conclusion: as fine particulate matter in the air decreased, the human life span increased. Reductions in air pollution accounted for as much as 15% of the overall increase in life expectancy in the study areas. (Pope et al., *New England Journal of Medicine*, vol 360, p. 376, 2011).

In an informal session with GASP members before his talk, Dr. Pope commented on GASP's accomplishments. He said that, thanks to us, Pittsburghers live longer by a full year. We can't take full credit for that--but we sure have been doing our part. 

Mobile Monitoring Part 3: Variability in Air Pollution in Allegheny County

by Albert Presto, Center for Atmospheric Particle Studies, Carnegie Mellon University

In previous editions of the Hotline, I introduced a mobile laboratory for measuring air pollutant concentrations in and around Pittsburgh. The mobile lab operates out of the Center for Atmospheric Particle Studies (CAPS) at Carnegie Mellon University. Without rehashing too much detail, we can sum up the advantages of mobile sampling in a few sentences. Mobile sampling allows us to measure a suite of pollutants at many locations; this is in contrast to traditional air pollution monitors, which are stationary. When compared to traditional stationary monitors, the mobile laboratory trades spatial coverage – the number of sites we can visit and make measurements – for temporal coverage. Mobile sampling is a powerful tool if we want to understand fine-scale differences in pollutant concentrations, or if we want to investigate emissions from small sources, such as Marcellus Shale gas wells.

One of the major research efforts using the mobile laboratory has been to understand the spatial variability in air pollutant concentrations in and around Pittsburgh. In order to do this, we defined 40 sampling sites to investigate the influences of three variables: elevation (hill versus river valley), traffic, and industrial point sources. By distributing our sampling sites based on these variables, we can investigate the sources and distribution of air pollutants.

In this edition of the series, I will share some results that I presented at the recent Regional Asthma Summit co-sponsored by the Heinz Endowments and Allegheny General Hospital. We conducted mobile sampling during most of 2012, focusing specifically on intensive measurements during both the winter (January-February) and summer (July). Each of our 40 sampling sites was visited at three different times of day (morning, afternoon, and overnight) in order to understand the diurnal patterns in pollutant concentrations.

For example we learned that in the mornings, vehicular emissions dominate air pollutant concentrations, especially for two components of particulate matter known as black carbon and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. Black carbon, or BC, is the black soot formed from incomplete

combustion. A canonical image of BC is the black smoke belched by a heavy-duty diesel truck. Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, or PAHs, are a class of compounds that have various ill health effects and are also the result of incomplete combustion. During the morning hours, the distributions of BC and PAHs at high traffic sites and low traffic sites are identical, suggesting that traffic is the major source of these pollutants. Later in the day, in the afternoon and evening, the high traffic and low traffic sites are more distinct. PAHs seem to be strongly linked to emissions from gasoline vehicles, whereas BC has strong contributions from both traffic and other sources, including industrial sources.

Two vapor-phase pollutants, benzene and toluene, do not show a strong influence of traffic. Rather, benzene seems to be associated with local point sources – industrial sources, especially those located in river valleys. Many folks will comment that benzene and toluene are classic markers of vehicular pollution, but our data do not bear this out.

Overall, hilltops are cleaner than valleys, and low traffic sites are cleaner than high traffic sites. Whether pollutant concentrations are higher in the valleys is the result of there being more sources in the valleys – most industrial sources

and many major roads are located in the river valleys – or the result of meteorology and pollutant transport remains to be determined. Also, the contribution of industrial sources deserves more attention. Pollutant concentrations can be higher very close to these sources, but more analysis is needed to understand the spatial impact of these large pollutant sources.

The mobile sampling data is also being used to develop pollutant maps using a statistical method known as Land Use Regression (LUR). LUR searches for correlations between pollutant concentrations and geographic variables such as proximity to traffic, elevation, and building density. LUR methods are widely used in epidemiological studies, and can typically explain 50-75% of the observed variability in pollutant concentrations. We will be applying our LUR maps for use in health studies, focusing first on relationships between particulate pollution and asthma in Pittsburgh. 🚲



CMU's mobile lab collects data in a variety of locations like this Marcellus Shale site.

The Air We Breathe: A Regional Summit on Asthma and Other Health Impacts of Air Pollution

by Ted Popovich, GASP Board Member

World Asthma Day, May 7, 2013, was marked in Pittsburgh by a second annual summit convened by Allegheny General Hospital and the Heinz Endowments' Breathe Project. This regional conference was dubbed *The Air We Breathe: A Regional Summit on Asthma and Other Health Impacts of Air Pollution*. While last year's inaugural conference focussed on asthma and the environment, this year's conference was more expansive. Not only did presenters address our asthma epidemic in southwestern Pennsylvania, but they discussed how air pollution affects birth outcomes, cancer, cardiopulmonary illness and mortality rates.

The 200 of us who attended the summit took in a treasure trove of information from ten expert academicians and researchers. Their organization affiliations included Allegheny General Hospital, Carnegie Mellon University, Cleveland Clinic Children's Hospital, Harvard University School of Public Health, John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Pediatric Alliance, and the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health.

The conference was "...intended for internal medicine and family practice physicians, pediatricians, physician's assistants, nurse practitioners, nurses, asthma specialists, pulmonary specialists, cardiac specialists, obstetricians, public health specialists and members of the community." I attended as a community member and was on the lookout for my health care providers. My allergist Sergei Belenky was present as a co-director of the conference and as a presenter of *Asthma Control Strategies*.

The common thread throughout the day was the clear link between air pollution and poor health. According to conference co-director Deborah Gentile, Director of Research, Division of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology at Allegheny General Hospital, Pittsburgh ranks 4th as one of the most challenging places to live with asthma. She connected this ranking with The American Lung Association State of the Air 2013 report which ranks Pittsburgh 7th in short term particle pollution, 8th in year round particle pollution and 24th in ozone, all failing grades.


Giovanni Piedimonte, Physician-in-Chief at Cleveland Clinic Children's Hospital, returned from last year's summit to present his fascinating *Origins of Asthma*. He recounted again the controlled study in which he moved children from a polluted urban environment to a clean rural environment. In a matter of days, their asthma and other respiratory ailments were reduced significantly.

Keynote Speaker Joel Schwartz, Professor of Environmental Epidemiology at Harvard University School of Public Health, transitioned the program asthma-related topics to *Air Pollution and Health*. His presentation was novel. He stated the premise, "Particulate air pollution kills more people in the United States than AIDS, breast cancer and prostate cancer combined." Then we were to ask him questions to convince ourselves that his premise was true. He adroitly retrieved reference slides from his library of presentations to help prove his points.

Ron White, a senior associate at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and owner of R.H. White Consultants, Inc., shared findings from his research report, *The Health Impacts of Pittsburgh Air Quality: A Review of the Scientific Literature, 1970-2012*. The report was commissioned by The Heinz Endowments. It was a good way of wrapping up the conference. One finding shows that Allegheny County ranked in the top 2% in overall air pollution-related cancer risk and seventh in the country with respect to cancer risks from power plants and large industrial sources. In studies of acute, or short term, responses to air pollution exposure, Pittsburgh air pollution levels have increased the risk of heart and lung disease, adverse birth outcomes and premature death.

I'm hoping that The Air We Breathe Summit 2014 will lead us to public policy outcomes.

Presentations from Summit 2013 can be found at <http://www.wpahs.org/education/continuing-medical-education/handouts/asthma-summit-2013>

Watch the Joel Schwartz: Air Pollution and Health presentation video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6P8I1xxVSmw> 

The Choice Is Yours: Choose Green Energy

by Jonathan Nadle, GASP President

All power generation has negative environmental consequences. Some, such as the mining and burning of coal, are quite obvious. One has only to watch the smoke stack of a coal-fired power plant (or live near it), or see orange acid mine drainage flowing into a stream to understand this on a very visceral level. Others, such as those caused by nuclear power, are not so obvious... until there's an "accident" or significant release of radiation. Yet others are a matter of some debate. Take unconventional natural gas drilling (methane "fracking") for instance. Proponents say there is minimal environmental harm if it's done right and that natural gas burns cleaner than coal and oil. It also puts off less carbon dioxide and thus can help reduce our CO2 emissions that contribute to global climate change. Opponents say that fracking is rarely done right and point to instances of groundwater and air contamination caused by the process. They also point to studies that show, depending on how much methane (a more potent greenhouse gas, GHG, than CO2) is estimated to be lost to the air through leaks, that use of fracked gas is barely better or has about the same impact on climate change as the burning other carbon-based fuels for power.

If one is concerned about minimizing his or her environmental impact and reducing his or her carbon footprint, there are a number of ways to do that. On a macro level, supporting environmental groups like GASP, voting for pro-environment politicians, and advocating for public policies (on local, as well as state and national levels) that reduce carbon pollution are worthy actions. But on a personal level, using energy more efficiently and using more cleanly produced energy are good options.

Transportation accounts for about a third of the total US GHG emissions, and buildings, including our homes, account for about 40%. So minimizing driving and/or driving fuel efficient vehicles helps, as does having an energy efficient home. Most homes in the Pittsburgh region are older (many were built from 1920 to 1960) and are quite inefficient in their use of electricity and gas. For my (compensated) job, I work as a certified home energy auditor for the nonprofit Conservation Consultants, Inc. We provide independent, thorough evaluations of buildings for utilities and individuals who want to know how they can make their home more comfortable and efficient. When a home is "weatherized" with the energy efficient retrofits we recommend, it typically becomes 25 to 35% more efficient.

On the electric power end, it's generally accepted that renewable energy sources, including the most prevalent ones



Solar power is an option in Pennsylvania when you choose a renewable energy supplier.

of solar and wind power, cause the least environmental harm overall. So "voting with your pocketbook" and purchasing "green," renewably generated power is another action one can take. There are a number of "alternate suppliers" serving the Pittsburgh region that will provide renewably sourced electricity to you - typically at a cost commensurate with your current "dirty power" supplier. They offer competing prices and plans, as well as varying degrees of renewable power. Some suppliers are aggregators which purchase power from generators; others develop and operate power plants (typically wind and solar farms). Some feature locally produced power while others get it from plants in other areas. The bottom line is that purchasing green power from alternate suppliers is environmentally beneficial and helps grow the green power market. Incidentally, according to a recent study cited by the Union of Concerned Scientists, the cumulative (historical average annual) subsidies to the oil, gas, and nuclear industries represents 94 percent (!) of all government subsidies distributed to the energy sector. So clearly there's a need to ramp up government support for renewables, as many other countries are doing, as well as for individuals to provide support through their choices.

The PA Public Utility Commission website offers info and current rates, percentage of renewable power, where the power's generated, contract terms, and more: www.papowerswitch.com. The alternate suppliers also have websites that provide detailed information. Switching providers is typically a quick and easy process, so don't be afraid to do so if you find a supplier you like. A number of GASP's board members and supporters have put their money where their mouths are and switched to a renewable energy supplier. We encourage you to consider doing so, too, as well as using your energy efficiently.



Greening Your Bookshelf

by Paola Corso, GASP Member

In our *Greening Your Bookshelf* column, we review books that discuss themes of interest to GASP members whose concerns range far beyond particulate matter and fly ash. This column will hopefully be a landing pad and a take-off point for those interests. No endorsement by GASP of these books or ideas is implied or intended.

Paola Corso is an award-winning author of poetry and fiction books, most recently *Once I Was Told the Air Was Not for Breathing*. In Paola's first "Greening Your Bookshelf" column featuring environmental poetry and fiction, she interviewed Daniela Gioseffi, editor of the website, *Eco-Poetry.org*.

Daniela Gioseffi is an American Book Award winning author of 16 books of poetry and prose on social justice, ecological truth, war and peace issues. Her compendium of world literature, *On Prejudice: A Global Perspective* contains a chapter by Al Gore on environmental racism. The new edition of her women's studies classic, *Women on War: International Writings*, featured essays by Vandana Shiva and Arundati Roy on environmental issues. Daniela began editing and publishing *Eco-Poetry.org* prior to the super storm known as Hurricane Sandy that deeply wounded her home city of New York. She is a member of environmentalist Bill McKibben's 350.org and Al Gore's *climateralityproject.org*.



GASP: You have an impressive history of activism—civil rights, feminism, economic justice, and now the environment. What compelled you to get involved in this movement and what part can poetry play in environmental social change?

Daniela: There is no doubt that global warming is due to devastate everyone. What is the use of writing books or poetry if future generations will struggle for basic food and water on a planet that can't sustain life? Many people are not fully aware of the consequences. They think it means that life will go on in a tropical climate. Nothing could be farther from the truth! Our major media are not alerting us, or connecting the science between climate change and super storms, drought, floods, earthquakes. My hope is to enlist writers, who are aware of the beauties and sustenance supplied by the natural world, and inspire them to write more about climate crisis. It's what I can do within my own community to create greater awareness.

GASP: What are some of the key environmental issues today and how can poetry reach readers in a way that perhaps non-fiction can't?

Daniela: Scientists are expecting five million climate refugees yearly—people displaced from low-lying coastal areas and flooded or drying farmlands. It is bound to be horrendous if we, the people, do not all now demand taxes on carbon emissions and clean renewable energy development.

Poetry can make the issues emotionally palpable. It can dramatize the tremendous moral and ecological crisis of global warming's consequences, the human suffering that has and will ensue from increasing super storms like Katrina and Sandy or the tsunami that killed so many in Japan and Sri Lanka, as well as the earthquakes in Haiti that are a result of changing weather, rising ocean temperatures and levels, causing shifts in tectonic plates underground and ocean floors.

GASP: How do you define eco-poetry compared with nature poetry?

Daniela: Ecologic is an element of eco-poetry, but it has many facets. As Jonathan Skinner, who used to do a hard-copy magazine of the genre wrote: "...For some readers, eco-poetics is the making and study of pastoral poetry, or poetry of wilderness and deep ecology. Or poetry that explores the human capacity for becoming animal, as well as humanity's ethically challenged relation to other animals. For others, it is poetry that confronts disasters and environmental injustices, including the difficulties and opportunities of urban environments. For yet others, eco-poetics is not a matter of theme, but of how certain poetic methods model ecological processes.... Or how poetic experimentation compliments scientific methods Rather than locate a "kind" of writing as "ecopoetic," it may be more helpful to think of eco-poetics as a form of site-specificity— to shift the focus to ... "green" discourse itself, and to an array of practices converging on ... planet earth that is the only home our species currently knows...." I like Skinner's definition and feature it on *Eco-Poetry.org*.

GASP: Aside from themes and issues, how might poetry's rhythm, syntax, line breaks, form on the page, etc. express ecological ethics?

Daniela: I feel that poetry uses these devices to evoke emotional truths and sharing of feelings that motivate us to action to save ourselves and our threatened biosphere, our universal Gaia system that brings us all together as Earthlings. It can have a cadence and rhythm that matches a feeling, or inspires action. An idea or emotion might be more beautifully expressed in carefully chosen words, musical meter, and imagery that carry more power than mundane speech to arouse the heart in combination with the head.

GASP: Tell us about the Eco-Poetry.org website and what's on it.

Daniela: Eco-Poetry.org, is subtitled: "Literature of Ecological and Climate Crisis Concern." It is a site whereon poets respond to ecological wonders as well as climate crisis emergency. Some of the poems are about appreciating the glories of nature. Some are about warnings of wildlife disappearing. Others tell of disasters or super storms caused by climate change now upon us in extreme weather events. Major American poets are represented, i.e. Galway Kinnell, Alfred Corn, Marge Piercy, Alicia Ostriker, D. Nurkse, Ishmael Reed, as well as world class poets like the ancient poet, Rumi, or Walt Whitman, and renown Nobel Laureate, Pablo Neruda.

GASP: How does this website represent current thinking about ecology and its new technologies? Can you give an example?

Daniela: Actually, I have an editorial that links to most of the important websites on the issues. It includes a recent book titled *Our Choice: A Plan to Solve the Climate Crisis* by Al Gore written in conference with the 100 U.N climatologists worldwide who won the Nobel Prize with him. My editorial tells of how there's enough geothermal, solar and wind power to take care of all our global electrical needs. Only governmental will is lacking. We need to stop seeing climate crisis as a political opinion. It's a scientific fact of survival we all need to activate in all.

GASP: I'd like to end the interview with an eco-poem of yours.

Daniela: Thank you. I'm 72 years old, and I've had a life, but in this excerpt of "Carbon Summer or Nuclear Winter," I imagine the horror for younger people attempting to survive in the future.

...I watch my grandson's small hands spin / his toy globe,
and realize there will be / no eyes, no ears, no hands, no art,
no song, / as our dusty planet, / home to our dried tears
of love and laughter— lost in endless space / with all our
poetry— could spin / burning in silent thirst.// Some say
the world will end in carbon summer, / Some say in nuclear
winter— but from what I've seen of carbon fire, / nuclear
ice is also great / and would suffice.

☺



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GASP in Action



Above: GASP's SCA Green Cities Fellow Karrie presented air quality info at the Environmental Charter School's Earth Night event.



Top right: Students from the Girls, Math & Science Partnership visited the GASP office and participated in an air quality activity.



Bottom right: GASP Executive Director Rachel Filippini was recognized at the UPMC Environmental Initiatives 5th Anniversary Celebration on April 4th.



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Spotlight on a GASP Staff Member

GASP's newest Student Conservation Association Green Cities Fellow, Karrie Kressler, has worked with us since spring of this year. She was selected from a sizable pool of applicants, which was fortuitous as she had selected GASP from among her intern options: "I had my eye on GASP from the beginning, and moved to Pittsburgh's Bloomfield, only half a mile from the office with the hope that I'd be placed here. Now I can walk to work!"



Karrie graduated from Earlham College in 2008 with a degree in Mathematics and with a concentration in Physics. After school she spent most of her time traveling across the US. Now, though, her family is happy that she's back in Pennsylvania, just a few hours away from her hometown so they can visit each other more often.

Karrie works alongside Sam Thomas, our intrepid Athlete's United for Healthy Air (AU) Coordinator, to empower local athletes to become champions for cleaner air. Karrie mentions several key program aspects, including distributing the interactive AU learning device called the AU toolkit to local schools and youth clubs, and supplying our educators with methods to talk about air pollution. The AU campaign also has a bike monitoring program in which portable particulate monitors are affixed to bikes to track air quality along Pittsburgh's streets and bike paths, drawing a picture of where folks can exercise, commute, and play in a healthier way. Karrie is also working on GASP's new EPA School Flag Program, which increases school community awareness of daily changes to our local air quality conditions. Finally, Karrie says "Don't forget, we've got the Clean Air Dash and Fest coming up this Fall, when we'll bring together local environmental groups, athletes, and families to run for cleaner air in Pittsburgh."

Karrie's favorite part of her job is working with schools, which is when she really feels that her work is "paying off." She has listened to students explain why we need to push for clean air more clearly and succinctly than most adults and thinks to herself, "Now if that doesn't just fill you with

warm fuzzies!... followed quickly by, "I just found a future board member..." Karrie 1, air pollution, zip.

Outside of her work with GASP, Karrie volunteers with the Hazelwood Food Forest, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and Allegheny Cleanways. An avid outdoors kind of gal, Karrie enjoys finding local hiking spots, tending to her "ever-growing kitchen-counter-top garden," and eating greasy diner food. She also bikes and canoes, but likes trying her hand at almost anything, and welcomes opportunities to learn new skills. Currently, she's taking local classes in sewing and craftwork.

Karrie can be seen out and about representing GASP at local events. We welcome her aboard and are glad we chose each other!



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Clean Air Dash and Festival

GASP and Athletes United for Healthy Air are very excited to announce the first ever Clean Air Dash and Festival 5K extravaganza! This event is made possible thanks to the Heinz Endowments' Breathe Project.

This 5K race and fun-filled festival will take place on Saturday October 19th, 2013 in the South Side Riverfront Park. The USATF sanctioned route will be along the gorgeous South Side Riverfront Trail. Runners can expect a flat, fast course perfect for setting that new personal best or breaking the running shoes in on your first 5K!

Registration for the Clean Air Dash and Festival is currently live! Please go to www.gasp-pgh.org and click on the Clean Air Dash logo on the right hand side to register. All registration is handled through Active.com and is completely safe and confidential.

If you're not a runner or are simply looking for a more laid back type of Saturday, we've got you covered. In addition to the race, there will be a festival full of engaging vendors, delicious foods, and plenty of fun activities for kids and adults alike. Take the time to run some football drills with a member of the Pittsburgh Passion, test your vertical limits on the Venture Outdoors Climbing Wall, and so much more! Come to run, come to have fun, and come to learn about how you can become a champion for cleaner air in this beautiful city!

We can't wait to enjoy the event with you! Lace up those shoes and get moving for Clean Air! We are all entitled to it!



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