

## Monthly Review: March 2012

*The American Geosciences Institute's monthly review of geosciences and policy goes out to the leadership of AGI's member societies, members of the AGI Geoscience Policy Committee, and others as part of a continuing effort to improve communications about the role of geoscience in policy. The current monthly review and archived monthly reviews are all available online. Subscribe to receive the Geopolicy Monthly Review by email.*

### \*\*\*Announcements\*\*\*

1. **Apply for AGI's 2012 Fall Internship By April 15**
2. **Congressional Visits Day in April and September - Join Us in DC**
3. **Attend AGU Science Policy Conference in DC on April 30 - May 3**

### \*\*\*Congressional News and Updates\*\*\*

4. **House Republicans' Budget Passes and Committees Consider Appropriations**
5. **Senators Concerned for NOAA Tsunami Program Funding**

### \*\*\*Federal Agency News and Updates\*\*\*

6. **Supreme Court Rules Unanimously Against EPA in Wetlands Enforcement Case**
7. **EPA's New Source Performance Standards for Fossil Fuel-Fired Power Plants**
8. **EPA Will Delay Pavillion, Wyoming Study for USGS Testing**
9. **NRC Sends Implementation Report to Congress**
10. **U.S. Forest Service Finalizes Planning Rule**
11. **Review of MSHA Actions Prior to Upper Big Branch Mine Disaster**
12. **NSF Will Update Merit Review Criteria**
13. **U.S. Census Bureau Releases Optimistic Education Data**
14. **BOEM Releases its First Issue of 'Ocean Science' Journal**

### \*\*\*Other News and Updates\*\*\*

15. **Anniversary of Tohoku Earthquake/Tsunami and Fukushima Disaster**
16. **Two Reports Highlight 2011's Expensive Natural Disasters**
17. **AGI and Others Host Hazards Briefings on the Hill**
18. **UVA and American Tradition Institute Case Update**
19. **Mining Societies Complete Workforce Trend Report**
20. **NESTA and NAGT Oppose Tennessee's "Monkey Bill"**
21. **National Asbestos Awareness Week: April 1-7**
22. **Contribute Questions for 2012 Presidential Science Debate**
23. **AGI Submits Testimony for Science Appropriations**
24. **2012-2013 William L. Fisher Congressional Science Fellow**
25. **Key Reports and Publications**
26. **Key Federal Register Notices**
27. **Key AGI Geoscience Policy Updates**

### 1. Apply for AGI's 2012 Fall Internship By April 15

The American Geosciences Institute's Geoscience Policy offers summer and semester internship opportunities for geoscience

students (undergraduates and/or Masters students) with an interest in public policy and in how Washington impacts the geoscience community. Interns gain a first-hand understanding of the legislative process and the operation of executive branch agencies while enhancing their writing, research, and web publishing skills. Deadlines for online submission of applications are March 15 for summer, April 15 for fall and October 15, 2012 for spring 2013.

The American Geophysical Union, the Soil Science Society of America, the American Institute of Physics, the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the American Chemical Society offer similar internships that may be of interest to geoscience students. Please visit their web sites or contact AGI at [govt@agiweb.org](mailto:govt@agiweb.org) for more information.

[Back to top](#)

## **2. Congressional Visits Day in April and September – Join Us in DC**

Geoscientists are invited to join organized groups of scientists and engineers for workshops and visits with congressional members and committees in April and September 2012. Decision makers need to hear from geoscientists. Become a citizen geoscientist and join many of your colleagues for a workshop at AGU headquarters followed by a day conducting visits with members of Congress or congressional staff on Capitol Hill to speak on the importance of geoscience research, development, and education.

### **April 24-25, 2012**

Science-Engineering-Technology Congressional Visits Day (SET-CVD) is a larger event for all the sciences.

### **September 11-12, 2012**

Geosciences Congressional Visits Day (GEO-CVD), an event specifically geared towards geoscientists.

Please contact Linda Rowan by replying to this email or send an email to [govt@agiweb.org](mailto:govt@agiweb.org) for more information or to sign-up.

[Back to top](#)

## **3. Attend AGU Science Policy Conference in DC on April 30 – May 3**

The American Geophysical Union (AGU) is holding their first annual Science Policy Conference from April 30 to May 3 in Washington, DC. The conference will bring together scientists, policymakers, and other stakeholders to discuss the intersection of the earth and space sciences and public policy.

The conference includes an AGU and National Geographic cosponsored training session on science communication for scientists on April 30 followed by two days of forums on the Arctic, renewable energy, critical minerals, hydraulic fracturing, water resources, natural hazards, coastal management, and oceans. Speakers include Director of the United States Geological Survey Marcia McNutt and Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Jane Lubchenco. A list of speakers, agenda, and other details can be found at AGU's Science and Policy Conference web site.

[Back to top](#)

## **4. House Republicans' Budget Passes and Committees Consider Appropriations**

The Republican-led House passed a budget resolution (H. Con. Res. 112) for fiscal year (FY) 2013 on March 29, 2012 before adjourning for a two-week recess. The non-binding resolution would change tax laws and tax rates, reform health care, change Medicare and reduce discretionary spending on most programs except for Defense.

The final vote was divided primarily along party lines with 228 Republicans voting for the resolution and 10 Republicans and 181 Democrats voting against. The resolution sets forth non-binding budget levels for agencies as well as 10-year plans for revenues, outlays and deficits. The cuts for science agencies would be significant and would force the termination of programs and support for research. The resolution sets discretionary spending for FY 2013 to levels below those agreed upon under the Budget Control Act of 2011 (S.365; Public Law 112-25). The resolution is seen by many as a political statement by most Republicans in the House of their preferences for the federal budget. The resolution may be used by both parties in campaigns for the November elections to distinguish party differences regarding federal spending, revenues and entitlements. The Democratic-led Senate and the Obama Administration have voiced opposition to the Republican-led House budget resolution.

The Senate Budget Committee filed a "deeming" resolution on March 20 that sets discretionary spending levels for the Appropriation Committee for FY 2013 based on the requirements of the Budget Control Act. The resolution also sets discretionary caps for the next decade.

The House and Senate Appropriations Committees continue to work on appropriations for FY 2013. Appropriation subcommittees and other committees held hearings on the President's budget proposal for agencies within their jurisdictions. The American Geosciences Institute provides an overview of appropriations for geosciences research and education with summaries of some

hearings.

[Back to top](#)

## **5. Senators Concerned For NOAA Tsunami Program Funding**

A group of six senators led by Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) sent a letter on March 13, 2012 to Appropriations Committee Chairman Daniel Inouye (D-HI) urging him not to entertain proposed cuts to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Tsunami Program. A separate group led by Senators Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and Mark Begich (D-AK) wrote a letter to President Obama requesting emergency funds to track the estimated 1.5 million tons of debris, some of which are approaching the U.S. coast earlier than predicted, as a result of the March 2011 Japanese tsunami.

Senators Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Daniel Akaka (D-HI), and Cantwell joined Feinstein in signing the letter to Inouye. The senators write, "Cutting funds for tsunami early warning systems jeopardize the safety and economic stability of communities in our states, so we ask that you maintain funding for NOAA's tsunami program at Fiscal Year 2012 levels."

Cantwell and Begich write, "We are deeply concerned that government agencies are not taking this risk seriously. The federal government has yet to dedicate adequate resources or create a solid coordinated action plan for tsunami debris response." They request National Science Foundation RAPID funds for research and criticize the administration's Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 budget request for NOAA's Marine Debris Program, which would be reduced by 25 percent and moved from the Office of Response and Restoration to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

The American Geophysical Union, American Geosciences Institute, American Society of Civil Engineers, and the Scripps Institute of Oceanography in partnership with the Ocean Studies Board of the National Research Council held a tsunami briefing on March 21. Eddie Bernard of NOAA, John Orcutt of Scripps Institute of Oceanography, and John Schelling of the Washington State Emergency Management Division gave presentations to congressional staff on tsunami warning systems, preparedness, and resilience in the United States. A video of the briefing and copies of the speakers' presentations can be found on the Hazards Caucus Alliance web site.

[Back to top](#)

## **6. Supreme Court Rules Unanimously Against EPA in Wetlands Enforcement Case**

The U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that property owners facing potential enforcement actions under the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1251) can challenge the determination before being forced to comply. *Sackett vs. Environmental Protection Agency* began when the Sackett family of Bonner County, Idaho received a compliance order from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) which claimed their construction project was discharging pollutants into navigable waters.

The Sacketts took their case to the Federal District Court and argued that the compliance order was "capricious" under the Administrative Procedure Act (5 U.S.C. 706) and that it deprived them of due process in violation of the Fifth Amendment. The US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit dismissed their case in 2010 concluding that the CWA precluded pre-enforcement judicial review of compliance orders and that such a preclusion did not violate due process. The Supreme Court's recent decision overturns the Ninth Circuit's decision. Justice Antonin Scalia wrote the court's opinion which includes concurring opinions written by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Justice Samuel Alito. The Sacketts now will have the chance to claim their land is not a wetland.

[Back to top](#)

## **7. EPA's New Source Performance Standards for Fossil Fuel-Fired Power Plants**

On March 27, 2012, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released standards of performance for greenhouse gas emissions for new stationary sources from electric utility generating units. The rule requires new fossil-fuel-fired electric utility generating units that are greater than 25 megawatts electric (MWe) to meet an output-based standard of 1,000 pounds of carbon dioxide per megawatt-hour.

The performance standard is based on natural gas combined cycle technology. Right now, natural gas-fired power plants emit about 850 pounds of carbon dioxide while coal-fired plants emit about 1,800 pounds per megawatt-hour. EPA expects new coal-fired power plants to meet the standard by employing carbon capture and storage (CCS) of about 50 percent of the carbon dioxide emitted in the exhaust gas at startup or through application of CCS over an averaging period of 30 years.

Public comments are being accepted and public hearings will be held. See EPA's webpage, Carbon Pollution Standard for New Power Plants for more details.

[Back to top](#)

## **8. EPA Will Delay Pavillion, Wyoming Study for USGS Testing**

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will delay its report into potential water well contamination as a result of hydraulic fracturing in Pavillion, Wyoming until the United States Geological Survey can conduct additional tests. A draft report issued by

the EPA on December 8 indicated that EPA had found constituents in groundwater above the production zone of the Pavillion natural gas wells that are similar to some constituents used in well operations, including the process of hydraulic fracturing. The EPA will delay convening the peer review panel on the draft Pavillion report until the USGS data are publicly available. EPA will extend the public comment period, which had previously been scheduled to end on March 3, 2012, through October 2012. All EPA information regarding the groundwater investigation at Pavillion, Wyoming can be found on the EPA web site.

[Back to top](#)

## **9. NRC Sends Implementation Report to Congress**

On March 12, Chairman Gregory Jaczko of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) sent a report on the status of its implementation of the Near-Term Task Force recommendations to Congress. The Near-Term Task Force was formed after the March 2011 Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear meltdown in Japan and issued their report, Recommendations for Enhancing Reactor Safety in the 21st Century, in July 2011. The Conference Report of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2012 (P.L. 112-74) requests the NRC submit a written status report one year after the disaster.

Jaczko and the four other commissioners of the NRC appeared at a hearing before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works on March 15, 2012 to discuss their efforts in implementing the new safety recommendations. In the status report and at the hearing, Jaczko sorted the recommendations into three tiers. Tier one consists of those recommendations that were implemented immediately, tier two consists of actions that are to be taken once resources are available, and tier three consists of those recommendations that require further study. The NRC issued a request for information to all license holders on March 12 that addresses seismic, tsunami, and flooding hazards. The NRC is required by Public Law 112-74 to ask reactor licensees to re-evaluate their seismic, tsunami, and flooding hazards.

[Back to top](#)

## **10. U.S. Forest Service Finalizes Planning Rule**

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 (16 U.S.C. 1604) governs the land management plans for every national forest or grassland managed by the Forest Service and requires that land management plans must be revised no later than every 15 years. The Forest Service finalized the 2012 Planning Rule, the process of developing and revising the management plans, in March 2012.

The final planning rule was developed after more than two and a half years of public input, including more than 300,000 public comments. The final planning rule will require management plans to include components to maintain and restore ecosystem and watershed health and resilience; protect water, air, and soil resources; provide for plant and animal diversity; provide for sustainable recreation; and address water quality and riparian area protection and restoration. The final planning rule creates a new two-tiered strategy for monitoring at the unit level and on a broader scale. This new approach is designed to allow land managers to track changing conditions and measure management implementation effectiveness. The Forest Service will begin implementing the new rule to develop, revise, and amend plans 30 days after it was published in the Federal Register.

[Back to top](#)

## **11. Review of MSHA Actions Prior to Upper Big Branch Mine Disaster**

On March 6, 2012 the United States Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) released an internal review of the actions taken by MSHA before the 2010 disaster at the Upper Big Branch Mine in Raleigh County, West Virginia.

On April 5, 2010, a coal dust explosion ignited by a smaller methane explosion killed 29 miners.

The purpose of the report entitled "Internal Review of MSHA's Actions at the Upper Big Branch Mine-South Performance Coal Company Montcoal, Raleigh County, West Virginia" was to review the actions by the agency before the explosion and to provide recommendations for future action. The review involved interviews with 90 past or present employees of MSHA and analyzed 12,500 pages of documents. The report identifies areas where inspection and plan approval processes were improperly administered, the factors that led to these missteps, and actions that have been put into place since the disaster.

[Back to top](#)

## **12. NSF Will Update Merit Review Criteria**

The National Science Foundation will update its merit review criteria regarding broader impacts for proposals and awards. The National Science Board decided that the two merit review criteria should be retained, but more guidance should be provided. NSF intends to announce specific changes in April of 2012, conduct a public comment period, make any further revisions by October of 2012 and implement the revisions in January of 2013. View the NSF announcement for more details.

[Back to top](#)

## **13. U.S. Census Bureau Releases Optimistic Education Data**

Using data collected in the 2011 Current Population Survey, the United States Census Bureau presented statistics on the levels of

higher education achieved by adults. The Educational Attainment in the United States: 2011 supplement shows that more than 30 percent of American adults 25 and older hold at least a bachelor's degree. In 1998, fewer than 25 percent of adults 25 and older had this level of education. The most recent census found that more than 33 percent of the nation's 56 million bachelor's degree holders are in the sciences. Most notably, the number of Hispanics with a bachelor's or higher education degree increased by 80 percent in the past decade.

[Back to top](#)

#### **14. BOEM Releases Its First Issue of 'Ocean Science' Journal**

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) released its first edition of Ocean Science since the reorganization of the former Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement. The journal highlights recent science and technological information of interest to offshore energy and ocean science. BOEM funds an average of \$30 million per year for research in the Gulf of Mexico, the Atlantic, the Pacific, and the Arctic. This edition's theme is renewable energy.

[Back to top](#)

#### **15. Anniversary of Tohoku Earthquake/Tsunami and Fukushima Disaster**

The one year anniversary of the magnitude 9 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami (March 11) in Japan that led to over 20,000 fatalities, over \$100 billion in economic losses, over \$250 billion in response and rebuilding costs, and the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant, was acknowledged with ceremonies and reviews in March of 2012. Japan has shut down all of their remaining nuclear power plants, while Germany, Italy and Switzerland are reconsidering nuclear power. France, Canada and the United States remain committed to nuclear power and initiated reviews of nuclear safety. China is reviewing efforts to build nuclear power plants at a relatively brisk pace in a rapidly growing country.

In the United States, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) initiated an immediate review of safety at 104 nuclear power plants in the U.S. and set-up the Near-Term Task Force which provided recommendations on lessons learned from Fukushima in their report, Recommendations for Enhancing Reactor Safety in the 21st Century. On March 12, 2012, the NRC issued regulatory requirements in response to lessons learned from Fukushima. Three orders require mitigation strategies, hardening containment vents and enhancing spent fuel pool instrumentation. More information is available from the NRC's webpage, Actions in Response to the Japan Nuclear Accident.

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) published a report entitled U.S. Nuclear Power Safety One Year After Fukushima along with a press release in early March. UCS criticized the NRC for placing the first of 12 recommendations from the task force as the lowest priority. The first recommendation was to clarify government requirements for "beyond-design-basis" accidents, but the NRC is not moving forward on this. The industry has initiated their own plan to purchase more emergency equipment and place the equipment at multiple locations, so plants are better prepared for unexpected crises. UCS is concerned that the industry approach is not sufficient but without NRC guidance it will become the standard.

[Back to top](#)

#### **16. Two Reports Highlight 2011's Expensive Natural Disasters**

Two reports were released in March 2012 that review the record-breaking costs of 2011's global natural disasters. The Brookings Institution and the London School of Economics (LSE) released "The Year That Shook the Rich: A Review of Natural Disasters in 2011" and the Geneva Association released "Extreme Events and Insurance: 2011 annus horribilis." The past year, 2011, was the most expensive year in terms of disaster losses in history, 75 percent higher than 2005, the second costliest year. Globally, the economic cost of disasters in 2011 was \$380 billion.

The Brookings/LSE study found that while 2011 was the most expensive year in disaster losses, the number of disasters and number of people affected by them was below average in comparison with the previous decade. Furthermore, the report called for adjusting disaster plans and mitigation strategies due to a new and shifting "normal" as a result of climate change.

The Geneva Association, an international insurance think tank, compiled nine essays on risk adaptation, assessment, and management measures in developing physical and economic resilience to natural disasters. The first section of the report reviews the economic and insured losses of the 2011 natural disasters and describes the role insurance played in managing these extreme events. The report reviews the potential for public-private initiatives to cover extreme events and the development of catastrophe bonds and other risk-linked scenarios as sources of capital for insurance mechanisms. The second part of the report focuses on how insurance responded to specific events including the March 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami, the Christchurch earthquake, and a series of devastating tornadoes in the central and southern United States.

[Back to top](#)

#### **17. AGI and Others Host Hazards Briefings on the Hill**

On March 29, congressional briefings about Earthquakes in the East and Tornadoes brought greater understanding of the science,



engineering and emergency management needed to improve resilience to policymakers. The events were sponsored by AGI and other science groups and were organized in cooperation with the Congressional Hazards Caucus and the Hazards Caucus Alliance. Speakers from the United States Geological Survey (USGS), University of Memphis, and the Central United States Earthquake Consortium (CUSEC) participated in a morning briefing on the New Madrid Seismic Zone and the August 2011 Mineral, Virginia earthquake. The briefing was moderated by David Spears, the State Geologist of Virginia. Speakers from the National Severe Storms Laboratory, Joplin-Jasper County Emergency Management, and the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) presented at a lunch briefing on tornadoes. The briefing was moderated by Veronica Johnson, Broadcast Meteorologist for NBC4, Washington DC. Video of the briefings and copies of the speakers' presentations can be found on the briefing sites.

[Back to top](#)

#### **18. UVA and American Tradition Institute Case Update**

The number of legal battles involving climatologist Michael Mann and the release of his emails while employed at the University of Virginia (UVA) is now down to one. The Virginia Supreme Court has ruled against Virginia Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli's case demanding the release of Mann's emails which leaves just the American Tradition Institute's case against UVA demanding the same documents. That case is scheduled to be heard in Manassas, Virginia on April 16, 2012.

The Virginia Supreme Court ruled that Cuccinelli lacked the authority to subpoena records including emails, drafts, and handwritten notes. Justice Leroy Millette, Jr. wrote in the court's opinion that the state anti-fraud act, which Cuccinelli used to try and obtain Mann's emails, does not authorize the attorney general to issue civil investigative demands against UVA because under the act, they are not considered "persons."

A separate case set forth by the American Tradition Institute (ATI) has been scheduled to be heard on April 16 in Manassas, Virginia. The case began in January of 2011 when ATI, who is accusing Mann of manipulating climate change data, requested Mann's emails from UVA. The university released 1,800 of the 12,000 emails citing that the rest were not public record. A turn in the case came in November 2011 when ATI lawyers asked lawyers from UVA if they had released the emails to Mann himself. This led to UVA eventually admitting that they had released the emails to Mann, which ATI lawyers believed waives the university's right to exemption from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Mann and his lawyers are arguing that there is no waiver where the parties have a common interest in the documents, including a shared proprietary interest in protecting scholarly works under the scholarly works exemption to the FOIA statute.

[Back to top](#)

#### **19. Mining Societies Complete Workforce Trend Report**

The Society for Mining, Metallurgy, and Exploration (SME), the National Mining Association (NMA), the National Stone, Sand, and Gravel Association (NSSGA), and the Industrial Minerals Association – North America (IMA-NA) have collaborated on a report evaluating mining workforce trends for the next twenty years.

The report, entitled "Emerging Workforce Trends in the U.S. Mining Industry" was compiled using information provided by the participating societies. It identified the mining industry as one of the few that is adding long term and well paying jobs in the United States. Although only making up less than one quarter of one percent of total U.S. job market, the mining industry can be directly attributed with contributing to 13 to 14 percent of the U.S. job market. This report concluded that the mining industry will continue to grow at a constant rate over the next 20 years, adding 11,000-13,000 jobs annually to meet the growing resource demand and to compensate for a large number of retirements. Ominously, the report concludes that the U.S. lacks an up and coming skilled workforce to match this job growth and the skilled domestic workforce that does exist may be lured away to other countries with higher wages.

[Back to top](#)

#### **20. NESTA and NAGT Oppose Tennessee's "Monkey Bill"**

The Tennessee Legislature has passed legislation to encourage teachers to present the "scientific strengths and weaknesses" of topics such as "biological evolution, the chemical origins of life, global warming, and human cloning." The Tennessee House of Representatives passed House Bill (H.B.) 368 a week after its companion bill, Senate Bill (S.B.) 893, was passed on March 19. Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam has said that he will discuss the legislation with Tennessee's state board of education before signing or vetoing the bill. A similar bill, H.B. 1551, passed the Oklahoma House of Representatives in March but will not see a vote in the State Senate.

There has been widespread backlash against S.B. 893 and H.B. 368. An editorial by the Nashville Tennessean from March 21, 2012 referred to the two bills as "monkey bills" and described them as "wedging open a door to include a radically divisive, ultra-conservative Christian agenda disguised in politically correct language." The National Association of Geoscience Teachers (NAGT) and the National Earth Science Teachers Association wrote letters on behalf of their societies expressing their opposition

to SB 893 and HB 368. NAGT writes that “rigorous science education in Tennessee is badly served by SB 893 or HB 368, and we urge Tennessee’s representatives, state senators, and governor to reject this legislation.” NESTA writes that the two bills “misrepresent key scientific concepts and principles, and would undermine the education of Tennessee’s students.”

The Oklahoma State Senate will not take up H.B. 1551 after it passed in the State House of Representatives on March 15. The bill that would have encouraged teachers to present the “scientific strengths and weaknesses” of “controversial” topics was sent to the Senate Education Committee in the present legislative session but the Senate will not meet again before the deadline for house bills to be reported from their senate committees. Oklahomans for Excellence in Science Education (OESE) credited a “major response” against the bill by science societies and individual Oklahomans as the reason the Senate Education Committee did not hold a vote on it before the deadline.

[Back to top](#)

#### **21. National Asbestos Awareness Week: April 1-7**

On March 6, 2012 the Senate passed a Senate resolution (S.RES.389) introduced by Senator Max Baucus (D-MT) declaring April 1-7, 2012 National Asbestos Awareness Week.

National Asbestos Awareness Week is designed to keep the public informed of the dangers of exposure to asbestos fibers. Danger exists from naturally occurring and manufactured asbestos. Naturally occurring asbestos refers to several minerals that might be liberated from formations and once airborne can affect health if humans breathe in the fibrous materials. Exposure to manufactured asbestos may occur in non-renovated buildings and facilities built before 1975. Prolonged exposure to asbestos can cause diseases such as mesothelioma. Thousands of workers in the United States are exposed to asbestos on a daily basis.

[Back to top](#)

#### **22. Contribute Questions for 2012 Presidential Science Debate**

Science Debate 2012 is compiling questions to ask President Barack Obama and his Republican challenger as part of the 2012 election. Users can submit questions or vote on submitted questions which are categorized by topic. The goal is to ensure that science issues are considered by the presidential candidates and to understand the perspectives of presidential candidates on science issues. Science is critical for the health, wealth and security of the nation, yet it is often overlooked in presidential elections, so it is imperative that candidates discuss their views on science for public consideration.

In 2008, Science Debate 2008, organized in cooperation with the U.S National Academies, the Council on Competitiveness and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) brought together many science and engineering societies (including the American Geosciences Institute) to develop questions for the 2008 presidential candidates from a list of 3,400. Fourteen questions were culled and formulated from the thousands and the presidential candidates answered these questions in writing in lieu of an actual science debate. Obama and Republican Presidential Nominee John McCain submitted responses to the questions and the questions and answers are available online.

[Back to top](#)

#### **23. AGI Submits Testimony for Science Appropriations**

The American Geosciences Institute (AGI) submitted testimony in support of federal investments in research and development (R&D), science education and geosciences workforce training to the relevant House and Senate appropriations subcommittee for fiscal year 2013 in March of 2012. AGI supports geosciences R&D and geosciences education through the National Science Foundation, Department of Energy, United States Geological Survey, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Institute of Standards and Technology and the Smithsonian.

[Back to top](#)

#### **24. 2012-2013 William L. Fisher Congressional Science Fellow**

The 2012-2013 American Geosciences Institute’s William L. Fisher Congressional Geoscience Fellow is Anna Henderson. Anna earned her Bachelor of Arts in Geology-Biology from Brown University and her Doctorate in Geology from the University of Minnesota. Her dissertation focused on hydrogen and oxygen isotopic analyses to understand seasonal precipitation and evaporative processes in current and past ecosystems. She was awarded a Canadian Institute for Advanced Research Postdoctoral Fellowship and is studying the evolution of grasslands at Pennsylvania State University. She has conducted research on the Juneau ice fields of Alaska and the lake sediments of Lake Bosumtwi in Ghana. She is a member of the American Geophysical Union, the Geological Society of America, and the Association for Women Geoscientists.

[Back to top](#)

#### **25. Key Reports and Publications**

\*\*\*National Academy of Sciences (NAS)\*\*\*

**Progress, Challenges, and Opportunities for Convening U.S. and Russian Research Reactors: A Workshop**

The National Academies and the Russian Academy of Sciences held a joint symposium in June 2011 to address the protection of highly enriched uranium (HEU). HEU is used for fuel for research reactors and as targets for medical isotope production but, if stolen or diverted, can be used to build nuclear weapons. To mitigate this risk, the U.S. and Russia convert HEU used in research reactors into low enriched uranium (LEU) fuel. This report addresses the recent progress of converting research reactors, lessons learned for overcoming conversion challenges, increasing the effectiveness of research reactor fuel use, and future research reactor conversion plans, challenges, and opportunities.

#### **Sustainable Water and Environmental Management in the California Bay-Delta**

The San Francisco Bay Delta Estuary is a central element in California's water supply system. Recent actions taken under the federal Endangered Species Act and lawsuits have led to conflict concerning the amount of water that can be taken from the delta for agriculture, municipal, and industrial purposes. The Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) is being prepared collaboratively by local water agencies, environmental and conservation organizations, state and federal agencies, and other interest groups to provide the basis for issuance of endangered species permits for the operation of state and federal water projects. This report, from the Water Science and Technology Board of the National Academy of Sciences, reviews the initial public draft of the BDCP in terms of its adequacy of its use of science and adaptive management. The report later identifies the factors that may be contributing to the decline of listed species, recommends future water delivery options that reflect proper consideration of climate change, and advises what degree of restoration of the Delta system is likely to be attainable.

#### **The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty: Technical Issues for the United States**

This report, completed at the request of the Office of the Vice President and the Office of Science and Technology Policy, reviews and updates the 2002 National Research Council report, *Technical Issues Related to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty*. The United States is in a strong position to maintain a safe and effective nuclear weapons stockpile without testing and to monitor global nuclear testing, the 2012 report finds. It assesses the capabilities the U.S. possesses to do so and the commitments necessary to sustain the stockpile and the U.S. and international monitoring systems. Sustaining this position of strong technical capabilities will require a strong scientific and engineering base and a capable workforce with a broad base of nuclear security expertise.

\*\*\*Government Accountability Office (GAO)\*\*\*

#### **DOE Loan Guarantees: Further Actions Are Needed to Improve Tracking and Review of Applications**

Prepared for the House and Senate Subcommittees on Energy and Water Appropriations, this Government Accountability Office (GAO) report examined the status of the applications to the Department of Energy (DOE) Loan Guarantee Program (LGP) and the extent to which the LGP has adhered to its process for reviewing applications that were selected. GAO recommends in this report that the Secretary of Energy fully implement a consolidated system to provide information on LGP applications and reviews and regularly update program policies and procedures.

#### **Interior Has Strengthened Its Oversight of Subsea Well Containment, but Should Improve Its Documentation**

Prepared from April 2011 to January 2012, this report examines the oil and gas industry's improved capabilities for containing subsea wells in the Gulf of Mexico, the Department of the Interior's (DOI) oversight of subsea well containment in the Gulf, and the potential to use similar subsea well containment capabilities in other federal waters, including those along the Alaska coast. While the report notes that DOI has improved its oversight of subsea well containment, it recommends that DOI document a time frame for incorporating well containment response scenarios into unannounced spill drills.

#### **Significant Challenges Remain for Access, Use, and Sustainment of the International Space Station**

Prepared as testimony to a hearing before the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology on March 28, this Government Accountability Office (GAO) report focuses on the progress the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has made and the challenges NASA faces in accessing, ensuring full utilization of, and sustaining the International Space Station (ISS). It finds that although NASA has done a "credible job of ensuring the ISS can last for years to come," it is still unclear whether the agency will be able to productively use the station for science.

#### **Renewable Energy: Federal Agencies Implement Hundreds of Initiatives**

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) reviewed federal renewable energy initiatives in fiscal year 2010 and found that 23 agencies and 130 subagencies implemented nearly 700 initiatives. The Department of Energy, Department of Defense, Department of Agriculture, and Department of the Interior were collectively responsible for 60 percent of these initiatives. The most commonly supported sources of renewable energy were bioenergy, solar, and wind. More than 80 percent of the initiatives span four federal roles – supporting research and development, using renewable energy in vehicle fleets and facilities, providing incentives for commercialization and deployment, and regulating, permitting, and ensuring compliance. The report contains no recommendations.

\*\*\*Congressional Research Service (CRS)\*\*\*

#### **Rising Gasoline Prices 2012**



This Congressional Research Service (CRS) report discusses the price impact of several short-term options that may address rising gas prices that have been considered by policy makers. It covers the potential price impacts of a release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, a gasoline tax holiday, relaxing fuel specifications, restricting refined products exports, limiting financial speculation, and diplomatic measures. An additional set of options focuses on long-term measures that may prevent negative impacts if gasoline prices rise in the future including encouraging efficiency, oil production, and alternative fuels. It concludes that the pursuit of long-term measures in the absence of short-term measures, to the degree those short-term measures are (or are not) effective, may make it more likely that higher gas prices will not go away for the time being. It points out, however, that higher prices may provide market incentives for investments by consumers and firms in efficiency, energy production, and alternative fuels.

[Back to top](#)

## **26. Key Federal Register Notices**

**DOE** – The Department of Energy is requesting comments, suggestions, and information by April 11, 2012 on the proposed continuation of the State Energy Program and the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant. [Monday, March 12, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 48)]

**DOE** – The Department of Energy is announcing a request for nominations to fill the vacant positions on the Environmental Management Advisory Board. [Wednesday, March 14, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 50)]

**EPA** – The Environmental Protection Agency is announcing a request for nominations to fill six vacancies on the Environmental Laboratory Advisory Board. [Wednesday, March 14, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 50)]

**NOAA** – The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is announcing a workshop to review their U.S. Billion Dollar Disasters (1980-2011) dataset on May 3-4, 2012 in Asheville, North Carolina. [Wednesday, March 14, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 50)]

**DOE** – The Department of Energy has announced an open meeting of the Efficiency and Renewables Advisory Committee on April 18-19, 2012 in Washington, D.C. [Thursday, March 15, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 51)]

**EPA** – The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has announced a request for nominations of technical experts to form a Science Advisory Board panel to review the EPA's web-based Report on the Environment. [Friday, March 16, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 52)]

**NOAA** – The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has announced a Science Advisory Board meeting on April 5-6, 2012 in Washington, D.C. [Monday, March 19, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 53)]

**NRC** – The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is announcing a meeting of the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards on April 12-14, 2012 in Rockville, MD. [Tuesday, March 20, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 54)]

**NPS** – The National Park Service has announced the meeting of the National Park System Advisory Board on May 22-23, 2012 in Denver, Colorado. [Thursday, March 22, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 56)]

**NSF** – The National Science Foundation is announcing a request for membership recommendations to their scientific and technical federal advisory committees. [Thursday, March 22, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 56)]

**Coast Guard** – The Coast Guard is announcing an open meeting of the National Offshore Safety Advisory Committee on April 11, 2012 in New Orleans, LA to discuss issues related to safety of operations affecting the oil and gas offshore industry. [Monday, March 26, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 58)]

**EPA** – The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has announced a public teleconference of their Science Advisory Board Environmental Economics Advisory Committee on April 19, 2012 to discuss and review the EPA's Draft White Paper "Retrospective Study of the Costs of EPA Regulations: An Interim Report." [Monday, March 26, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 58)]

**DOE** – The Department of Energy has announced an open meeting of the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board at Argonne National Laboratories on April 17, 2012 to brief the board and allow for the subcommittees to report any progress. [Tuesday, March 27, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 59)]

**EPA** – The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has announced an open meeting of the National Advisory Committee and Governmental Advisory Committee on April 26-27, 2012 in Washington, D.C. to advise EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson on her duties as the U.S. representative to the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation. [Wednesday, March 28, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 60)]

**USGS** – The United States Geological Survey is announcing a meeting of the National Geospatial Advisory Committee on April 17-18, 2012 in Washington, D.C. with a public comment period scheduled for April 18. [Thursday, March 29, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 61)]

**DOE** – The Department of Energy's Office of Fuel Cycle Technologies has announced an informational meeting on April 28, 2012 at Argonne National Laboratories to gather individuals knowledgeable in nuclear fuel cycles from the public and private

sector. [Friday, March 30, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 62)

[Back to top](#)

## **27. Key AGI Geoscience Policy Updates**

- [Hearing to Review the Effects of the USGS Budget \(4/2/12\)](#)
- [Hearing on DOE Office of Science Budget Proposal for FY 2013 \(3/23/12\)](#)
- [Hearing on NSF Major Research Equipment and Facilities Management \(3/20/12\)](#)
- [Hearing on NRC Implementations and Recommendations One Year After Fukushima \(3/20/12\)](#)
- [Hearing on Oversight of Council on Environmental Quality \(3/19/12\)](#)
- [Hearing on USGS Budget Proposal for FY 2013 \(3/19/12\)](#)
- [Hearing on NASA Budget Proposal for FY 2013 \(3/19/12\)](#)
- [Hearing on DOE Budget Proposal for FY 2013 \(3/6/12\)](#)
- [Hearing on EPA Budget Proposal for FY 2013 \(3/5/12\)](#)
- [Hearing on DOI Budget Proposal for FY 2013 \(3/5/12\)](#)

[Back to top](#)

\*\*\*\*\*

Monthly Review prepared by Wilson Bonner and Linda Rowan, Staff of Geoscience Policy; Aaron Rodriguez AAPG/AGI Spring 2012 Intern.

Sources: Associated Press, AAAS, Environment and Energy Daily, Greenwire, New York Times, Washington Post, National Academies Press, Government Accountability Office, Open CRS, Thomas, House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, the White House, Department of Energy, Department of the Interior, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, National Science Foundation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Department of Commerce, United Nations, Department of Education, Department of Defense, Department of State, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Geneva Association, London School of Economics, Brookings Institution, and Virginia Supreme Court.

\*\*\*\*\*

This monthly review goes out to members of the AGI Geoscience Policy Committee, the leadership of AGI's member societies, and others as part of a continuing effort to improve communications about the role of geoscience in policy.

Compiled April 4, 2012.

---