

Sifting & Winnowing

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“Kodak moments” nostalgic for some, nightmares for others



Eastman Kodak's near-demise reminds many of happy Kodak moments, but for some in the Rochester community, not so much. In its heyday, the company burned over 70 million chemicals a year, releasing alarming amounts of heavy metals, PCBs, and methylene chloride into the air. Incineration itself created new chemicals such as dioxins and furans. Ashes laced with toxins were sent to landfills. In 1992, DEC reported that Bldg. 218 incinerator, off W. Ridge Rd., spewed more dioxin and hexavalent chromium than all the other NYS incinerators combined, illegally burning not only its own hazardous waste but that of at least three other companies. Its two big incinerators (including Bldg. 95 near the Genesee River) polluted a densely populated area of Rochester and parts of Greece and Irondequoit, all in an environmentally sensitive area near the Great Lakes ecosystem. The smoke traveled in an oval pattern that also passed, unnoticed, through Rochester's suburbs, most often northeast of ground zero.

Over the years, Kodak was encouraged to upgrade its incinerators with pollution controls that would have greatly reduced toxic emissions and particulates; but the company just barely complied with the inadequate regulations in force at the time, and even complained about them. In 1995, during Kodak's heyday of pollution, the NYS economic development commissioner wrote to then-CEO George Fisher: "Your leadership is an inspiration to those of us trying to re-engineer state government and make it more responsive to business customer needs." The letter also announced a \$20 million dollar plus state aid package composed primarily of tax credits. Fisher's compensation soared to over \$9 million. Kodak remained the state's top polluter.

But much of the damage had already been done. In March 1988 the *Democrat and Chronicle* revealed that at least 12 chemicals and 5 heavy metal contaminants in amounts that exceeded state guidelines had seeped from Kodak Park into groundwater underneath adjacent Rand St. and Steko Ave. In December, when a pipe ruptured and spewed out 30,000 gallons of methylene chloride, people from these neighborhoods who had never dreamed they would ever become activists rose up in anger during a series of DEC-sponsored meetings. Residents had already noticed an unusual number

of cancers afflicting neighborhood children. Frightened parents pulled their children from neighborhood School 41 in droves and tried to sell homes with virtually no resale value. Kodak stepped in to control the damage by helping families that chose to resettle; but residents of nearby streets who lived just outside the zone were ineligible. Yet, their property values had also plummeted. Some parents petitioned the state education dept. to close the school; but the school principal and Monroe County Health Director Joel Nitzkin were in denial. Nitzkin argued "that the wind the day of the tests was blowing directly at the school. Usually it's blowing in the other direction. And traces came not from ground vapor or the spill. but from smokestack emissions present in outdoor air as well." No wonder a mother got angry when her home a few blocks from Rand Street failed to qualify for Kodak help. "I'm held hostage in my home. After only four months on the market, I had to lower the asking price. Most families who looked at it said if I moved my house, they'd buy it."

A total of 24 schools were within a 3-mile radius of the two incinerators. Newspapers and prominent citizens also came to Kodak's defense. The NYS AG toxic prosecution chief disagreed: "This is what happens when environmental concerns are not top priority." (The quote made the *New York Times*, but not the then-two Rochester dailies). Kodak waited for the issue to die down before opening up the area to a new homeowner generation no doubt unaware of toxic groundwater.

Between 1990 and 2003, Kandid Coalition and other environmental activists measured Kodak Park air quality with EPA kits and called for further testing and state-of-the-art incinerators with pollution controls, proper incinerator permits, and full-time DEC incinerator oversight management. The coalition unsuccessfully requested DEC to require Kodak to install Maximum Achievable Control Technology (MACT) in its incinerator upgrades, instead of patching up outdated existing technology. Today, under bankruptcy law, Kodak is required to fulfill its clean-up obligations. The two incinerators have been shut down. But was the soil under Rand St., Steko Ave., and School 41 ever cleaned up? No doubt air quality has improved with the downsizing, but one wonders what emanates from Kodak smokestacks these days.

Organic label integrity

Martek Biosciences won final approval in December to add its additive oils to organic milk, baby food, and formula. Organic Consumers Association and Cornucopia Institute protested the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) decision to undermine organic label integrity by allowing so-called nutritional additives. Martek is looking to compete with conventional products that gain market share by promoting DHA and ARA additives. Cornucopia contends that Martek failed to disclose additive sources, some of which were identified only because they were accidentally found listed in another Martek product: an unapproved sugar alcohol, modified starch non-agricultural product thought to contain GMO corn; a disclosed additive containing corbyl palmitate not on FDA's approved list. This flouting of standards thus **holds algal oil to a lesser standard than fish oil, DHA's natural source.** Moreover, Martek processing included mutagenesis, which subjects the algae to harsh chemicals or radiation incompatible with organic production. Cornucopia charged Martek with failure to document the scientific genesis of its products, relying instead on promoting the company's own patented oils as "natural," while fermenting them in GMO conventional corn derivatives. Martek also uses microencapsulation, nanotechnology, bleaches, extracts, and synthetics. **But certified organic eggs, meat, and poultry cannot be legally produced from conventionally-fed animals. Organic processed foods should be held to these same standards.** NOSB members were led to believe that manufactured DHA from algal oil is as beneficial to human health as omega-3s from meat, dairy products from grass-fed animals, green vegetables, flax, nuts, and sustainable fish such as anchovies and sardines. NOSB members did not review peer-reviewed studies that reached the conclusion that manufactured DHA does not confer benefits equal to a diet high in omega-3s with a favorable omega-6 to omega-3 ratio. Instead, they relied on Martek's patent writer as a source. In addition, concerns by timid FDA scientists were trumped by aggressive Martek lobbyists. Formula manufacturers were expected to report any adverse reactions (of which there were quite a few) to FDA, but the agency told them to disregard reports of children with gastrointestinal problems, even though they often lead to failure to thrive, dehydration, invasive diagnostic procedures, and hospitalization. At the time, formula without these additives was still readily available, so parents could observe their children's dramatic recoveries after switching to formulas without the Martek oils. Now, almost all conventional and organic formulas contain these oils, so it's harder to prove a Martek oil\illness link.

The issue holds significance beyond baby food safety because it points up FDA's continuing unwillingness to uphold its own standards. The public has already lost confidence in the agency's failure to regulate GMOs, fragrances, aspartame, MSG, artificial food colors, and other inadequately tested materials. Martek "educates" the public about DHA on its pack-

aging by touting its miracles and making highly profitable, though scientifically unsubstantiated, health claims. It's a betrayal of the public, who count on organic label integrity. If April's NOSB board meeting does not reverse this precedent-setting misreading of organic standards, the value of the certified organic system we depend on in making healthful food choices will be compromised. Rep. Sam Farr (D-CA) is investigating claims that Martek's supplements are GMOs.

Bridges to nowhere

Our leaders seem to have forgotten that our planet is in crisis mode and has been so for some time. It is certain that the present emphasis on rebuilding the nuclear industry and expanding the rate of natural gas from shale and oil from tar sands will get us out of our current energy mess. By the time we admit that we can't afford any of these energy sources, either environmentally or financially, it may be too late to catch up. Obama and his Republican opponents seem to be united in calling for accelerated domestic fossil fuel exploitation that will reverse any climate change gains. And having recently marked Fukushima's one-year anniversary, resurrection of the once-failing nuclear industry is ill-timed.

Until quite recently, it was assumed that fossil fuel production in the Western Hemisphere would decline, as major oil fields in Canada, Mexico, and Venezuela became exhausted. But the Energy Information Administration (EIA), research arm of the Energy Dept., predicts that total production—crude oil, natural gas, liquids, biofuels, and shale oil—including the doubling of outputs from Brazil and Canada, will increase 38% by 2025. An already underway slowdown in US demand is thought to enable exports of whatever isn't used. Industry has persuaded the administration that our economy and foreign policy will benefit from an oil renaissance that centers on the Western Hemisphere rather than the Middle East. But this fossil fuel surge is not a result of recently discovered oil reserves. We knew they were there, but considered them inaccessible. New technologies making it possible to dig deeper with greater power to tap these sources are being aggressively pursued. Heavy fossil fuel extraction is financially and environmentally costly, disrupting water, land, forest, and sea.

Furthermore, acceleration of hydrofracking will mean drilling in relatively densely populated rural areas of Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York. Fracking disrupts rural communities with noisy, round-the-clock heavy tanker truck activity. Toxic chemicals threaten water supplies by leaking into underground aquifers. Returned water is dumped into municipal water-treatment systems unequipped to handle the volume. As the public learns about fracking from people who know what it's like to have their well water contaminated, NYS municipalities have been passing ordinances prohibiting it. Additional concerns are radiation released from Pennsylvania fracking and recent Ohio earthquakes resulting from high-pressure injection of fluid underground. Tremors in areas around Youngstown not known for seismic activity culminated in a 4.0-magnitude quake New Year's Eve. This was

not a result of fracking in Ohio; it was caused by wastewater exported from fracking in Pennsylvania. Because of impervious rock layers in Pennsylvania's Marcellus shale, the state's publicly owned treatment works cannot treat wastewater from Pennsylvania's own fracking operations so they ship it to underground wells in Ohio having that capability.

EIA predicts the Alberta Canadian tar sands oil to increase 80% by 2035; but more costly and complex techniques will be needed to exploit deposits buried deeper and deeper. The result will be an ever-greater volume of contaminated water that will be far more difficult to control than it is now. Alberta's jobs promotion justification could change if future governments come to realize its environmental costs. Same thing goes for Brazil's salt fields in the Atlantic, about 200 miles southeast of Rio de Janeiro, located beneath a mile and a half of ocean and another two miles of sand, rock and shifting salt layers. To reach them, drilling technology will be even more costly and sophisticated than that used in the Gulf of Mexico. The underground salt strata's instability risks a catastrophic blowout like that of the Deepwater Horizon.

It is a mistake to think we can insulate ourselves from Middle East chaos and violence by developing and depending on Western Hemisphere oil and gas sources. Oil is a global commodity. Exxon and Chevron (who think globally but don't act locally) won't give us a cheaper rate on our oil if they can get twice as much on the world market. Prices will not only not be cheaper at the pump, they may increase in a vulnerable market, as we postpone our inevitable transition to a postcarbon economy. The longer we wait, the more difficult it is likely to be, and we risk falling behind other countries who have the foresight to make the transition sooner.

By shifting the emphasis from renewables to fossil fuels, we can expect a significant increase in greenhouse gas emissions from oil and gas consumption and production. These technologies require far more energy than drilling for conventional fuels, emitting a correspondingly greater amount of greenhouse gases. EIA expects global carbon dioxide emissions to rise 43% by 2035, dimming hopes of averting planetary warming and drawing attention and money away from alternative fuels. The bridge argument is only valid if it includes massive investment in green energy or it will be, as economist Henry Jacoby of MIT says, "a bridge to nowhere."

To blame high gas pump prices on exported oil ignores the fact that commodity traders have caused the spike by excess speculation in futures markets. It's happened before and will happen again until the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) forces Goldman Sachs and others to stop. On March 21, five senators—Sanders (I-VT), Blumenthal (D-CO), Franken (D-MN), Klobuchar (D-MN), and Cardin (D-MD)—introduced a bill that would force the so-far ineffective CFTC to use emergency powers to rein in oil speculators by the end of a two-week period. The legislation is identical to bipartisan legislation that overwhelmingly passed the House during a similar crisis in 2008. Oil speculators control

over 80% of the energy futures market, a figure that has more than doubled over the past decade. High gas prices cannot be attributed to supply and demand, since we have greater supplies today than three years ago when the average gallon was \$1.94 and demand lower than it was in April 1997. Even Goldman Sachs admits that excessive oil speculation adds 56 cents a gallon to gas.

In what has to be seen as an industry triumph, NRC recently voted to open two power plants each in Georgia and South Carolina, acceptance of the former aggressively pursued with early cost recovery and loan guarantees, the latter not yet clear. NRC Chair Gregory Jaczko cast the lone dissenting vote both times, objecting to failure to implement recommendations made following the Japanese Fukushima nuclear disaster a year ago. Anti-nuclear groups are suing the Georgia company for failing to reveal loan guarantee terms. Wall Street doesn't regard nuclear power as an investment that pays off, but is fine with it if taxpayers pick up the tab. Pres. Obama justifies his approval by saying he supports multiple technologies. His political opponents hail the loan guarantees even after deriding Obama for many times smaller loan guarantees for solar power company Cylyndra.

Nuclear power is extraordinarily expensive. Each reactor costs at least **\$14 billion**. Other proposed reactors have run into opposition, so it's not quite the slam dunk industry had hoped for. Vermonters voted to close Vermont Yankee in a state referendum, but a judge ruled the vote invalid, designating NRC to make the decision. But the same Jaczko who had misgivings about plants in the South agreed to open Vermont Yankee in spite of numerous safety problems. Gov. Cuomo promises to close the aging Indian Point nuclear plant by 2015 because of safety concerns and proximity to NYC. The plant has been protested for decades, but Fukushima, which has a similar design, has revived interest in closing it.

Nuclear lobbyists have managed to breathe new life into nuclear power despite Chernobyl's contamination of more than 40% of Europe and the entire Northern Hemisphere. In an *Asia-Pacific Journal* article January 7, Gayle Greene says Fukushima has failed to correct the impression held by most mainstream media that nuclear technology is "clean," although many Japanese, who have been, are being, and will continue to be heavily radiated, don't agree. The clean nuclear fantasy is now accompanied by the low-doses-are-low-risk misconception, which also appeals to some misinformed environmentalists. The nuclear industry depends on our believing that. But reactors release radioactive emissions not only in accidents, but in routine operations and in produced waste. Plant workers and people living near reactors are at risk every day, as is all life on this planet. Greene says, "Waste produced by reactors does not dilute, disperse, and disappear, as industry advocates would have us believe, but is blown by winds, carried by tides, seeps into earth and groundwater, and makes its way into the food chain and into us, adding to the sum total of cancers and birth defects throughout the world."

Its legacy is for longer than civilization has existed. Plutonium's 24,000-year half life is, in human terms, forever." Before involving us further in nuclear expansion, Obama must ask his science advisers to consider the comprehensive Yablokov Chernobyl compendium study—far more thorough, honest, and accurate than the superficial International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) studies on Hiroshima and Nagasaki that are still the holy writ that nuclear proponents depend upon to keep us in the dark about nuclear power dangers.

Monsanto's disingenuousness

On March 16, OccupyMonsanto picketed Monsanto plants and offices in cities throughout the world. Monsanto has been the target of legal actions and bans in Brazil, Peru, Haiti, India, Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Switzerland. Organic Consumers' Association mounted an extensive campaign last year, Millions Against Monsanto. Another encouraging sign of Monsanto push-back is an increasing number of studies pointing to serious health risks associated with GMO food, including infertility, immune problems, accelerated aging, faulty insulin regulation, and changes in gastrointestinal systems. Federal judges have acknowledged that GMO crops spread mutant genes onto organic farms and into non-GMO varieties and plant relatives, and should be halted. An appeals court recently ruled that the public has the right to know whether the dairy products they buy contain rBGH (bovine growth hormone), which is linked to increased cancer risk. Roundup overuse has spawned a new generation of superweeds that require even more toxic herbicides such as 2,4-D. Roundup Ready crops require massive amounts of economically and environmentally expensive nitrogen fertilizer. Many farmers are losing market share because Roundup literally kills soil by destroying essential microorganisms, degrading its ability to sequester CO₂. Despite these setbacks, Monsanto hardly seems to flinch. This is largely attributable to the revolving door relationship the company has had with four presidents. When Monsanto got rBGH approved for milk, Monsanto's Margaret Miller prepared the report. When she became US Deputy Director of Human Safety and Consultative Services, she oversaw the report's acceptance. Michael Taylor represented Monsanto on legal rBGH issues before becoming FDA's deputy commissioner, writing FDA's rBGH's labelling guidelines and insisting not only that rBGH and regular milk were the same, but also deleting references to GMO problems in food, over objections by staff scientists. Now Taylor is back again as FDA food safety issues czar. Clinton's former senior trade advisor Islam Siddiqui became VP to negotiate trade issues for CropLife America, whose members include Dow, DuPont, and Monsanto. He is now Obama's trade negotiator. Ex-Monsanto lawyer Clarence Thomas became a Supreme Court Justice and voted in favor of Monsanto's GMO alfalfa. Monsanto hired Linda Fisher, who had served for 10 years as EPA's Asst. Administrator of Pollution Prevention, Pesticides, and Toxic Substances. She became Monsanto's head lobby-

ist under Bush II. Roger Beachy, ex-director of Monsanto-funded Danforth Plant Science Center, now heads USDA's Nat'l Institute of Food and Ag. Ramona Romero, corporate counsel to Monsanto's chief GMO rival Dupont, is USDA counsel. Bush II's Ag Secretary Ann Veneman, served on the board of then Monsanto affiliate Calgene, later bought up by Monsanto, which was also a former client of Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Monsanto also relies on an army of private investigators and agents, including Blackwater, to secretly videotape and photograph farmers, co-ops, seed dealers, activists, and anyone else suspected of infringing on its GMO seed patents. As a result, the company has sued hundreds of farmers for patent infringement, more often than not from seeds that landed in their fields by the wind, not purposely planted. Seeds were never patented before a 1980 Supreme Court decision permitted corporate world food supply control. In an attempt to shed its dreadful chemical pollution history, Monsanto has chosen soil pollution instead. In its push to control the seeds of more than half the planet, the company has captured as allies, not only US government officials of both parties, but also NAFTA and Bill Gates, who are ruining farms and farmers throughout the world. Patented Monsanto seeds account for 90% of US soybeans, corn, canola, cotton, sugar beets, and alfalfa production. Amounts of soy, corn, and canola in food products are beyond counting. Before Monsanto rebranded itself in the late 1990s as an agricultural company dedicated to "helping farmers around the world to feed, clothe, and fuel a growing planet," it had hosted more than 50 EPA Superfund sites contaminated by PCBs, dioxin, Agent Orange, and 2,4,5-T. Add to these an array of skeletons in Monsanto's chemical closet—saccharin, vanillin, sedatives, plastics, industrial fluids, resins, vinyl siding, fuel additives, fertilizers, pesticides, and AstroTurf—all of which have been spun off into a little-noticed Monsanto subsidiary company called Solutia.

A Cautionary Tale

Once upon a time, a couple of generations ago, the country Romania was ruled by a man named Ceausescu, who issued a decree that outlawed abortions and contraceptives. It was a poor country, so it was hard for those who had no children to afford the celebacy tax, but even harder for poor women to care for and support unlimited numbers of children. The fertility of Romanian women was under constant surveillance. Women under 40 were subjected to frequent pregnancy exams often performed before state officials. Women resorted to back-alley abortions. Maternal mortality rates soared. Women were sent to jail if convicted of abortion. Women seeking medical help following complications were denied treatment. Children whose parents were unable to support them were sent to underfunded, overcrowded orphanages, where abuse by staff, malnutrition, and neglect ran rampant. Ceausescu is long gone, but Romania is still feeling the effects of its lost generation with an overpopulation of street people, prostitution, venereal disease, and crime.