

Budget Agenda

Albany's ceremonial year begins with the Governor's State of the State message, but the serious business gets going when he presents the budget. This year, Albany seems to be operating under an accelerated schedule. Governor Pataki quickly proposed his spending plan and legislative budget hearings are already underway. Testimony on the Governor's environmental budget was heard on January 29, five weeks earlier than last year. (A summary of Environmental Advocates' budget testimony is available at www.eany.org.)

Numerous environmental groups spoke at the hearing and there was strong agreement on several key points, notably a fully funded Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). The goal is a minimum annual appropriation of \$125 million for key environmental projects. But the Governor has included some \$20 million in spending for capital and other projects that should be handled from the General Fund. Friends of the EPF, a coalition that is nearing 80 groups, recently conducted a statewide needs assessment and found that in the last fiscal year, there were over \$400 million in applications to the EPF. EANY and the EPF coalition called on lawmakers to support doubling the fund to \$250 million.

Many of those who testified pointed to an expanded bottle bill as one source of additional revenue to accomplish that goal. Other potential revenue sources included increasing the fees developers pay for stormwater discharge permits and lifting the dollar cap on air emissions pollution fees paid by power plants. These two measures alone could generate more than \$30 million. With the state's economy rebounding, and second home sales increasing, additional income from the real estate transfer tax could also augment the EPF.

Most of the groups, and several lawmakers as well, commented on the loss of staff at the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) in recent years. Research conducted by EANY's regulatory watch project has found that there are 900 fewer employees at DEC now than a decade ago. What is not known is how much of that work is being performed by off-budget hires, and how much is simply not getting done. Staff levels will go up for the new brownfield program and the state Superfund, and interviews for the first 35 new staff members have begun. But New York needs a strong DEC, especially due to the federal government's abdication of its regulatory responsibilities. ★

On the Alert

■**Snow Job:** The state DEC recently released a Comprehensive Draft Snowmobile Plan for the Adirondack Park. Although it includes some good ideas, the plan is also fraught with problems. The environmental impact assessment outlines a myriad of threats to plants, animals and soils, yet DEC still recommends expansion of snowmobile use in the Park and no inventory of existing trails is recommended to make sure the Park is in compliance with the state's mandated cap on total trail mileage. Public hearings are scheduled throughout the state (see *The Month Ahead*). DEC is accepting written comments until March 31. Send comments to: Rob Messenger NYS DEC Bureau of Forest Preserve Management, 625 Broadway, Albany, NY 12233-4254; by fax: 518-402-9028; or by email: lfadk@gw.dec.state.ny.us. Copies of the Draft Plan are available at any DEC office or at www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dlf/publands/snow/index.html. Contact David Higby, EANY, at 518-462-5526 ext. 239 or dhigby@eany.org for more information.

■**Mercury Meltdown:** The US EPA proposed its first ever mercury rules for electric power plants in December 2003. However, the proposed rules take the same approach as the Administration's weak Clear Skies air pollution control plan. By failing to require the 90 percent cut in mercury that is feasible, delaying cuts for ten years, and allowing trading of mercury emissions, the regulations would lead to continued contamination, despite the known dangers mercury poses to infants and children. In finalizing these regulations, EPA is planning on holding only one or two hearings and accepting comments for only 60 days. Write EPA and urge the agency to hold at least one public hearing in New York and to extend the public comment period by 30 days. Send letters to Administrator Michael O. Leavitt, EPA, Ariel Rios Building, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20460. For more information, contact Christine Vanderlan, EANY, at 518-462-5526 ext. 234 or cvanderlan@eany.org, or visit: www.eany.org.

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Environmental Advocates of New York is a non-partisan public interest organization working since 1969 on a comprehensive agenda of issues designed to oppose threats to the environment, to preserve natural resources and human health, and to fight for high drinking water and air quality standards.

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www.senate.state.ny.us
New York State Assembly
Albany, NY 12248
518.455.4100
www.assembly.state.ny.us
★ US Capitol Switchboard
202.224.3121

■**Trick or Treatment:** The federal Clean Water Act requires that raw sewage be treated to remove dangerous viruses and parasites before it is discharged into streams, lakes and drinking water sources. But on November 3, 2003, the EPA proposed a new policy that would allow sewage to be discharged during rain storms without full treatment. The proposal would increase the amount of bacteria, viruses and parasites in recreational waters and drinking water supplies. EPA is accepting public comments on its proposed policy change until February 9. Send comments to: Docket #OW-2003-0025, EPA, Water Docket, Mailcode 4101T, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW., Washington, DC 20460. For more information and to send a message to the EPA, visit: www.saveourevironment.org.

■**Sore Sites:** DEC has extended the public comment period on its draft Hazardous Waste Facility Siting Plan. Public comments will now be accepted until April 19, 2004. Send comments to Mr. Glenn Milstrey, NYS DEC, Division of Solid & Hazardous Materials, 625 Broadway, Albany, NY 12233-7251, faxed to: 518-402-9024, or emailed to hwsiting@gw.dec.state.ny.us.

The Month Ahead



www.GreenHomeNYC.org/evite or by email to rsvp@GreenHomeNYC.org.

February

1: Lower East Side Green Apple Solar Tour of energy efficient and renewable energy installations in the neighborhood. Start at 6BC Gardens, 6th St. in the middle of the block between B and C. 12:00PM-2:00PM (rain date in the spring). Call 212-260-1891 or visit: www.neighborhoodenergynetwork.org.

4-6: *Solutions for Success*, NY's ENERGY STAR® for Homes Conference and Awards Banquet, sponsored by the NYS Energy Research and Development Authority and the Long Island Power Authority in conjunction with Affordable Comfort, Inc. Rye Town Hotel, 699 Westchester Ave., Rye Brook. Visit: www.affordablecomfort.org or call 800-344-4866.

7: Public meeting to discuss LaFarge tire-burning plan, hosted by Friends of Hudson. LaFarge has proposed burning millions of tires yearly as fuel in their Ravena cement plant. North Pointe Cultural Arts Center, 62 Chatham St. (Rt. 9), Kinderhook. 1:00PM. Contact Susan Falzon at 518-800-0334 or falzon@mhcable.com.

9: Public hearing on Adirondack Draft Snowmobile Plan (see *On the Alert*.) 5209 Rte. 20, Guilderland. 5:00PM-8:00PM. Also: 2/11, 657 East Ave., Rochester, 5:00PM-

8:00PM; 2/24, Harbor Hill School, 3 Glen Cove Rd., Greenvale, 7:00PM-9:00PM; 2/25, 1115-47th Ave., Long Island City, 5:00PM-8:00PM; 3/2, Tupper Lake High School Gym, 25 Chaney Ave., Tupper Lake, 5:00PM-8:00PM; 3/3, Queensbury Town Hall, Glens Falls, 5:00PM-8:00PM; 3/10, Park Avenue Offices (Gym), Old Forge, 5:00PM-8:00PM; 3/11, State Office Building, 207 Genesee St., Conference Rooms A & B, Utica, 5:00PM-8:00PM.

11: *Living With Nature: Everyday Actions to Sustain Our Planet*, A Roundtable Discussion and Resource Fair sponsored by the American Museum of Natural History's Center for Biodiversity and Conservation. Museum's Main Auditorium (enter via 77th St. Entrance), Manhattan. 6:30PM-9:00PM. Free. Reservations strongly recommended. Call 212-496-3423.

12: *Alien Invasion*, sponsored by the Shawangunk Biodiversity Partnership. Learn the steps needed to protect the Shawangunks from alien species. SUNY New Paltz Lecture Center, Room 100, New Paltz. 7:00PM. Contact Hatti Langsford at 845-255-201 or Hatti.Langsford@oprhp.state.ny.us.

18: Green Building Forum, presentation on non-toxic building materials followed by discussions sponsored by GreenHomeNYC. Herman Miller Showroom, 12th Floor, 660 Madison Avenue, NYC. 6:30PM-8:00PM. Free. RSVP by evite at

19: *Farms for the Ridge*, sponsored by the Shawangunk Biodiversity Partnership. Overview of trends in farmland protection and update on what communities and land trusts in the Hudson Valley are doing. SUNY New Paltz Lecture Center, Room 100. 7:00PM. Contact Hatti Langsford at 845-255-201 or Hatti.Langsford@oprhp.state.ny.us.

19-21: Fourteenth North American Interdisciplinary Conference on Environment and Community, sponsored by Empire State College, SUNY. Featured speakers include Bill McKibben, environmental writer. Saratoga Springs. Call 518-255-5320 or 518-587-2100 ext. 386, or visit: www.esc.edu/EnvironConf.

20-22: Northeast Climate Conference, sponsored The Climate Campaign, a collaborative effort of the Northeast's leading student environmental networks. Come together for three days of skills workshops, state strategy sessions and speakers. Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Email conference@climatecampaign.org or visit: www.climatecampaign.org.

25: International Sustainable Design Competition for Lower Manhattan opening for submissions, sponsored by Green Ground Zero. Municipal Art Society, 457 Madison Ave., NYC. 5:30PM-8:30PM. Email Neil Chambers at neil@greengroundzero.org.

For Your Information



What a Day: Make plans now to attend Earth Day Lobby Day, April 19 in Albany. This annual event brings together hundreds of activists and students from across New York. Hear from government and environmental leaders, learn about current legislation, and lobby on key statewide issues. For more information, visit: www.eany.org/takeaction/earthday.html, or contact Laura DiBetta, EANY, at 518-462-5526 ext. 221 or edld@eany.org for more information.

Sail Away: The sloop Clearwater, the country's environmental flagship, is signing up volunteer crew right now for the months of April and May. Volunteers must be at least 16 and no experience is necessary. For information call Shelly Berlincourt at 845-454-7673 or visit: www.clearwater.org.

Pre-exposed: A University of Southern California study on childhood asthma rates has concluded that children exposed to household pesticides in their first year of life are more than twice as likely to develop asthma. The study, *Early Life Environmental Risk Factors for Asthma: Findings from the Children's Health Study*, appeared online in the December 2003 issue of *Environmental Health Perspectives* and is available at <http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/members/2003/6662/6662.html>.

Bronx Cheer: The Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation and the Department of Planning is looking for volunteers to help clean up the Bronx River and its tributaries. The Earth Team Volunteers Streamwalk Program will initiate an assessment of the Bronx River watershed. Volunteer training will take place on March 13. Anyone over 14 years of age is welcome to take part. Contact Cimbria Badenhausen at 914-864-7047 or ccb3@westchestergov.com.

Roll Out the Barrels: In addition to being a fire hazard, backyard burning of household waste is a leading source of dangerous pollutants, including dioxins, particulate matter, lead, mercury and hexachlorobenzene. The EPA has created a new section on its website (www.epa.gov/msw/backyard) containing information, links, presentations and other outreach materials for local governments to use with their residents. To order brochures, contact the National Service Center for Environmental Publications at www.epa.gov/ncepihom, by phone at 800-490-9198 or 513-489-8190, or email: ncepi@mail@one.net.

Activists' Corner

RAGE Against the Business Machine: When residents in the Village of Endicott learned that a decades-old chemical spill from IBM Corp. was polluting nearly 500 homes and businesses, they began organizing immediately. Resident Action Group of Endicott (RAGE) now meets monthly with the NYS Departments of Health (DOH) and Environmental Conservation, as well as local officials.

The pollution was not considered a threat until late last year, when tests showed chemicals, including known carcinogens, evaporating from the ground and entering buildings. State health officials, the Broome County Health Dept. and the Federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry have prepared a Public Health Response Plan for the Endicott community to outline what actions are planned to address community concerns related to contamination in the area.

For more information on RAGE, visit: www.rage-ny.org or email toxicspillendny@aol.com.



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