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BLACKSMITH INSTITUTE NEWSLETTER

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White Oak to Host First Annual Polluted Places Global Conference

With generous support from the Howard Gilman Foundation, Blacksmith Institute will be hosting the first annual Polluted Places Global Conference at the White Oak conference facilities in Jacksonville, Florida October 21st-24th. With over 20 international partners, country representatives, funders, and board members, the conference will highlight the Polluted Places Implementation Manual and Polluted Places Global Strategy. Issues such as developing local partnerships, diversified funding options, and health impacts of polluted sites will also be discussed. ▣

Inside this issue:

Russia, Thailand and Manila Site Assessments Completed

Senior Blacksmith staff spent much of September traveling to Russia, Thailand and the Philippines to conduct site assessments and design interventions for legacy pollution sites.

Lead concentrate transported in open wagons in Far East Russia

In Rudnaya Pristan and Dalnegorsk (see article on page 2), two mining towns in a remote area of the Russian Far East, toxic levels of lead have contaminated the surrounding soil, water and air. With over 80,000 people living in the affected area, the Blacksmith Institute has devised a strategy to begin remediation which includes public education and direct communication with the smelter owner.

A second site assessment was conducted near the Meycauayan River, which flows directly through Manila and is massively contaminated with lead, chromium, mercury, industrial waste and sewage. 250,000 local residents use the water for daily survival and the health risks in this area are innumerable. The Blacksmith Institute has begun to design a large-scale, long-term intervention which will require multiple layers of financial support.

In Map Ta Phut Thailand, south of Bangkok, a well-managed industrial estate occasionally leaks and releases industrial gases into the air, affecting over 100,000 people. After meeting with management officials, it was evident that the estate has adequate monitoring and emergency response mechanisms in place. However, the local hospital staff lack training in the treatment of occupational illnesses and industrial health. Blacksmith Institute will support a technical assistance program for knowledge sharing and training at the hospital. ▣

Russia: New Polluted Places Country Coordinator

Blacksmith Institute senior level staff traveled to Russia in early September and completed a month-long search for a Polluted Places Country Coordinator. Vladimir Kuznetsov was selected from a competitive applicant pool to fill the responsibilities of Country Coordinator. His responsibilities include implementing the Polluted Places process of identifying, assessing, and designing interventions to address polluted sites throughout all of Russia. Mr. Kuznetsov has a master's degree in Environmental Science from Moscow State University and is currently pursuing a PhD in Ecology. For the last eight years, Mr. Kuznetsov has been collaborating with the Russian Government and non-governmental conservation organizations to address environmental concerns in Russia. Previously, Mr. Kuznetsov was the Project Coordinator at the Charitable Fund "Biodiversity Conservation Center" in Moscow. The Blacksmith team also completed three Russian site assessments and began creating a remediation strategy for problems in Rudnaya Pristan (see article on Page 2). ▣

POLLUTED PLACES: Russian Lead Poisoning Project Launched

Lead poisoning will be targeted in Polluted Places' newest Russian project. The lead mining and smelting facilities of Dalnegorsk and Rudnaya Pristan were accepted as a project in September, following a visit by Blacksmith Institute programs staff.

Dalnegorsk, a remote Siberian town, has been a mining center since the 1890's. Today, the lead is mined and concentrated there, then shipped to the nearby village of Rudnaya Pristan for smelting in uncovered rail wagons which disperse lead dust along the way. Children, adults and animals are exposed to the toxic dust and over 80,000 residents along the railroad tracks and in Rudnaya Pristan are directly exposed to lead every day.

Blacksmith met with environmentalists, members of the local governments and industry representatives. It was agreed that a blood testing program, along with education on the dangers of lead poisoning, was needed.

Lead contamination is a serious issue here. The train tracks connecting the sites are covered with lead dust, the smelting plant has no effective pollution controls and residents have little knowledge of the dangers of the heavy metal. Soil testing by the tracks measures up to 200,000 parts per million (ppm), compared to the U.S. EPA's acceptable standard of 1,200 ppm.

In upcoming months, Blacksmith will work with local health officials and the Far Eastern Health Fund to implement blood lead testing and a public awareness campaign to educate residents of the dangers of lead. These measures are precursors to industry improvements that will drastically change production processes in the area, and improve the transport of lead concentrate. ▣

Derelict equipment covered in lead dust

A lead smelter in Rudnaya Pristan, Russia

Children and adults cross lead-tainted railroad tracks

POLLUTED PLACES TECHNICAL ADVISORY BOARD WELCOMES TWO NEW MEMBERS

Philip J. Landrigan, M.D., M.Sc

Dr. Landrigan , Director of the Center for Children's Health and the Environment at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, enthusiastically joined the Technical Advisory Board in August. Dr. Landrigan brings expertise in the effects of pollution on children and a long history of dedication to improving health for citizens of the global community. Dr. Landrigan is the chair of the Department of Community and Preventative Medicine and the Director of Environmental and Occupational Medicine. He is also the Editor-in-Chief of the American Journal of Industrial Medicine. ▣

Jack Caravanos Dr.PH, CIH, CSP

Dr. Caravanos, an Assistant Professor at Hunter College of the City University of New York, became the eighth member of the Technical Advisory Board in August. Dr. Caravanos directs the MS and MPH program in Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences at Hunter College. He has extensive experience in a variety of urban environmental and industrial health problems, including lead poisoning, mold contamination, asbestos and community environmental health risk. ▣

The Technical Advisory Board has a total of eight members and meets once a month to review Polluted Places site nominations and make recommendations on which polluted sites to conduct assessments of. ▣

Daurala Village, India: Chemical Poisoning

Polluted river in Daurala village

As part of an ongoing expansion of the Polluted Places program's rollout in India and Russia, Blacksmith staff visited a number of polluted sites during a site assessment visit to India in May. Among these sites, the village of Daurala in the Meerut District of Uttar Pradesh exhibited evidence of groundwater and soil contamination by two local plants producing organic chemicals and pesticide intermediaries. Pools of liquid waste dotted the countryside while villagers avoided certain tubewells due to chemical odors and past illness from drinking the water.

Villagers complained of intestinal disturbance and esophageal cancer while local health officials unofficially confirmed elevated health risks for those living close to the plants. Despite numerous complaints from villagers, the local pollution control authorities have not investigated polluted water sources.

In cooperation with Janhit Foundation, a local advocacy and citizens action group, Blacksmith Institute has conducted water and soil sampling and the results of these tests will be used to establish a firm causal linkage between the various reported illnesses and the polluting plants. It is hoped that clear evidence will compel the polluters to install proper safeguards against contamination and the local environmental authorities to investigate already-polluted water sources for future remediation or replacement. ▣

Environmental Management Trust Cleans Up Dar es Salaam Neighborhoods

Environmental Management Trust (EMT, formerly Clean Mikocheni Society) was founded with the help of Blacksmith in 2001 and has concentrated its efforts on halting industrial pollution and organizing a community response to solid waste and sewage in the Mikocheni areas of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Industrial waste from numerous industries and domestic sewage are dumped into streams and storm drains, polluting marine ecosystems and beach areas on the city's Indian Ocean coast.

EMT has worked with community groups and municipal officials to enforce anti-pollution by-laws and to compel owners to use wastewater treatment systems or install operational systems to stem illegal pollutant dumping.

Waste collection works in Mikocheni

Thanks to EMT's efforts and municipal involvement, among ten polluting industries EMT identified, six industries have now either constructed or repaired their treatment systems and two others now resort to importation of intermediary products that are slightly modified prior to resale.

Storm drains run clear in Mikocheni following EMT action

However, one toilet tissue manufacturing plant continues to pollute despite warnings from health officers. Recently, EMT teamed up with Mikocheni community members to submit a letter of complaint to the municipal legal officer, thus initiating legal proceedings against the polluter.

This is a major step in environmental enforcement in the area and empowers residents to hold industry accountable for its wastes. ▣

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Russia Updates:

Magadan & Tomsk

MAGADAN - Located in the remote Russian Far East, Magagan is perhaps best known as a region dotted with some of Stalin's most brutal labor camps. It rapidly industrialized under Soviet rule, and today is a city of about 130,000 people. In 1991, an area overlooking a public beach, was contaminated with improperly disposed radioactive waste - by a factory that has since closed.

During the spring of this year, an organization called Sodeistvie – Team Work united public groups, socially active citizens and government officials to address the situation. With the help of Blacksmith Institute, the site was surveyed, contaminated soil removed and landscaping is now underway to prevent erosion of soil.

The project solved an important environmental problem for the city - remediation of a radioactive stain located close to a city beach. It was also significant in that the resolution was found in cooperation with the state bodies and led the government to finally pay attention to an issue of such significance for the community.

TOMSK - In the 50's highly toxic DDT was widely used to exterminate the Siberian Silkworm throughout Russia. Significant quantities remained unused and stored in warehouses that have since collapsed. Inspections in Tomsk revealed that these toxic substances freely leak into the environment, dangerously polluting local settlements, wildlife and agriculture.

Last winter, with Blacksmith Institute's assistance, and participation of regional public organizations, Tomsk Department of Natural Resources and Preservation began work on the rehabilitation of old pesticides at a local agricultural cooperative.

Chemicals were contained and transported to a designated toxic waste storage site.

Russian society has historically been deprived of information on the effects of toxic chemicals on human health. Therefore, a significant portion of the project consisted of public education and lectures at area schools. ▣

3 tons of toxic DDT is transported for safe storage.