

ECC NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2004

Welcome to Spring, Earth Day, Passover and Easter. The following explains the science of spring: “The vernal equinox and autumnal equinox herald the beginning of spring and fall. At these times of the year, the sun appears to be directly over Earth’s equator, and the lengths of the day and the night are equal over most of the planet. This is because the Earth orbits the sun elliptically and, at the same time, spins on an axis that is tilted relative to its plane of orbit. This means that different hemispheres are exposed to different amounts of sunlight throughout the year. Because the sun is our source of light, energy and heat, the changing intensity and concentration of its rays give rise to the seasons of winter, spring, summer and fall. On or around March 21 of each year, the Northern Hemisphere reaches the vernal equinox and enjoys the signs of spring. At the same time, the winds are turning cold in the Southern Hemisphere as the autumnal equinox sets in.”

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/307734>

We have bad news and good news all in one breath: Vandals ripped off both informational signs that were mounted on the viewing platform in Wilcox Park. The good news is that they were retrieved from the mud at low tide because of the observant and sharp eyes of Laura Macaluso, for whom we are most grateful. Happily, they are still in good condition... only the boards on which they were mounted will need replacing. The wonder is how could they have torn them from the railing when they had six heavy screws holding them down. No one seems to know how to keep kids from destroying public property. Maybe the **Respect Program** could help with this problem of vandalism.

It would appear that the average price for gas has gone from \$1.49 to \$1.72 dollars per gallon, more in Connecticut. It should be noted that we in the US, still enjoy the lowest gas prices in the world. There are negatives to this increase as well as positives. The negatives of course, are obvious, those who really need to travel by car for their livelihood and/or their businesses. On the positive side, we need to be hit with this kind of pressure to remind us to conserve and develop clean alternatives for our fossil fuel addictions.

You can save fuel by:

- Maintain properly inflated tires.
- Avoid quick stops and starts (this can save up to two miles per gallon).
- Limit engine idling (idling consumes between one half and one gallon of gas per hour and wastes more gas than restarting the engine).

- Follow posted speed limits (each 5 mph you drive over 60 is like paying an extra \$.10 at the gas pump).
- Bundle errands to reduce vehicle miles traveled.
- Whenever possible, take public transportation or car pool.

To learn more about improving fuel economy see: <http://www.fueleconomy.gov>.

Global Warming Watch: The Register titled it: “**Carbon dioxide hits record level in atmosphere.**” “Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii reports that carbon dioxide, the gas largely blamed for global warming, has reached record-high levels in the atmosphere after growing at an accelerated pace in the past year.

“The reason for the faster buildup of the most important “greenhouse gas” will require further analysis, the U.S. government experts say.”

“Carbon dioxide, mostly from burning of coal, gasoline and other fossil fuels, traps heat that otherwise would radiate into space. Global temperatures increased by about 1 degree Fahrenheit (0.6 degrees Celsius) during the 20th century, and an international panel of scientists sponsored by world governments has concluded that most of the warming probably was due to greenhouse gases.”

Unfortunately, “Climatologists forecast continued temperature rises that will disrupt the climate, cause seas to rise and lead to other unpredictable consequences – unpredictable in part because of uncertainties in computer modeling of future climate.”

Scientists have determined that carbon dioxide in the atmosphere stood at about 280 parts per million before the industrial age. The Mauna Loa Observatory measured on Friday, March 21st carbon dioxide was 379 parts per million compared with about 376 a year ago.

This “increase of 3 parts per million is higher than the average annual increase of 1.8 parts per million over the past decade, and markedly more accelerated than the 1-part-per-million annual increase recorded a half-century ago, when observations were first made here.”

They were asked to explain why, they were cautious, that it needed further evaluation. But “China is taking off economically and burning a lot of fuel. India, too,” said Peter Tans, a prominent carbon-cycle expert at Nona’s Boulder lab.”

“British researchers have recently released a study suggesting that the world may be undergoing another major extinction, this one caused by humans.”

“A detailed study of bird and butterfly populations in Britain show a population decline of 54% to 71%. The 40-year study links the sharp decline in native bird, butterfly and plant species to the rise of human population

and climate change. “The authors of the study believe that this indicates that the sixth mass extinction in Earth’s history may be underway.” Published in March 19th edition of the journal *Science*.

Interested in seeing **NEW SOLAR HOMES?**
Contact Judi Friedman, **860-693-4813 or 860-693-4884.**

A Report on other ways to produce electricity:
“Environmental engineers at Penn State have shown for the first time that electricity can be generated from wastewater by microbial fuel cells (MFCs) while simultaneously removing pollutants.” They can produce between 10 and 50 milliwatts of power per square meter of electrode surface. This amounts to about 5% of the amount of energy needed to run one mini-Christmas tree light, while removing up to 78% of organic matter as measured by biochemical oxygen demand (BOD). The fuel cells work by using bacteria to help conduct electricity. The oxidation reaction that occurs inside the bacterial cell in turn lowers the BOD cleaning the water. The technology is still experimental, but the researchers are optimistic that MFCs may someday be able to help reduce the cost of wastewater treatment around the world.”

Other researchers have shown that MFCs can be used to produce electricity from water containing pure chemicals including glucose, acetate or lactate.

Our **ECC Meeting is Thursday, April 15 at 7:30 p.m. in Conference Room C of the Parsons Building.** **Open Spaces/Learning Places Video** will be presented by Colleen Murphy-Dunning, Director of the Urban Resources Initiative at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Open Spaces/Learning Places program seeks to give children an understanding of the urban ecosystem on six different scales. During the program, children explore urban open spaces such as their schoolyard, neighborhood pocket parks, vacant lots, cemeteries, parks and river corridors.

Colleen holds her B.S. in Public & Environmental Affairs from Indiana University, and M.S. in Forestry from Humboldt State University. Following her studies, Colleen pursued community-based forestry activities in Papua, New Guinea and later in Kenya. After returning to the U.S., she focused her community forestry work in urban areas. In 1995, she initiated the Community Greenspace program at the Yale Urban Resources Initiative. Colleen is now the Director of Hixon Center for Urban Ecology at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies. She is also the Chair of the Connecticut Urban Forest Council.

OUR EARTH DAY PROGRAM APRIL 24th

1. At 10:00 to noon at the Library is the **Organic Workshop.** Call 878-0910 to register and for suggested parking, as a sporting event will be going on at Fowler.

The main speaker will be Jim Carr whose book has come out this month, ***Gardening and Landscaping The Natural Way***. A book signing will take place after the workshop at the Café Atlantique. Mr. Carr specializes in ecological management of residential properties. This involves the creation and maintenance of natural landscapes and organic flower, vegetable and herb gardens. He is a regular instructor at the New York Botanical Garden where he teaches a variety of subjects.

Dr. Laurel Lobovits will speak about the risks of pesticides, and **Christina Swanke** will address the problems of how to rid your lawns of pests and weeds.

2. From 11:00 to 3:00 a **Silent Auction** at Café Atlantique will take place. The benefits of this auction will go to a newly formed (still pending) environmental group called The Milford Environmental Protection Initiative (MEPI). The funds will be distributed in the form of grants to those whose proposals will benefit and protect Milford’s open spaces and natural resources.

3. From 11:00 to 1:00, there will be a children’s program –**KIDS GO GREEN**, with hands-on display of Native American artifacts, Story Telling by Native American, Rainbow Star, and activities for making useful objects out of recycled items, bead crafts and a pine cone bird feeder, etc. It will be on the Green by the Gazebo. But if it rains, it will be held under the Pavilion behind the Library.

4. At noon, **THE SOUNDER**, a science boat, will arrive and dock at Milford Lisman Landing until 3:00 PM. On board, Schooner Sound Learning will be presenting “**Meet Marine Life**”. Participants will handle organisms from Long Island Sound in Schooner’s shipboard touch tank, as an instructor discusses their habitats, life cycles and adaptations. An adult must accompany children. This program has been made possible through the generosity of the Mayor’s Office and the Kiwanis Club.

5. At 12:30 The Milford Concert Band, under the direction and baton of Steve Saunders, will play until 2:00 at Milford Lisman Landing. They have been officially designated as The Milford Concert Band. (If you wish to join, go to www.milfordconcertband.org)

6. Between 3:00 and 3:30 at the Gazebo on the Green, we will be joined by Mayor James L. Richetelli, Jr. to announce the winners of the silent auction and to present a new environmental award, called *The Green Globe Award*. It is to celebrate and reward those who have been involved with efforts that benefit our community’s environment. Winners will be announced in the newspapers prior to April 24th. Hope you all will attend and support this effort. If you would like to volunteer, we can always use the help. Please call 878-0910.

For Earth Day, Cub Scout Pack 709 will be cleaning up Gulf Beach and Pack 17 will be cleaning Walnut Beach. Thanks very much Scouts!

Sincerely,
Ann Berman, Chair