




earthwise

News and Ideas for UCS Members and Activists

Food Safety Gets a Long-Needed Boost

Foodborne illnesses in the United States cause more than 3,000 deaths and 125,000 hospitalizations each year, costing the economy \$152 billion. These statistics should decline in the future thanks to the Food Safety Modernization Act, which was passed by Congress in late December and signed into law on January 4.

Under the new law—the first major changes to the food safety net since 1938—the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has the authority to order recalls of contaminated food, a process that was previously voluntary. The law also requires companies to disclose more information about their production practices and enables the government to use modern scientific methods to detect contamination. In a victory for sustainable agriculture, smaller farms—such as those who sell at farmers markets—are exempted from new reporting requirements, as they are largely not associated with food safety problems.

UCS helped shore up support for the bill during congressional debate by circulating findings from our 2010 survey of government scientists and inspectors, hundreds of whom reported experiencing instances in which public health had been harmed by businesses withholding food safety information. 

close to home

A Clean Energy Barn Raising

Jennifer Norris, director of major gifts at UCS, describes how a neighborhood team helped make her home more efficient.

Ever since my family and I moved to Arlington, MA, four years ago, we have been working to improve our 83-year-old home's energy efficiency. We installed compact fluorescent lightbulbs and a programmable thermostat, insulated an addition built by previous owners, and upgraded to a more-efficient boiler. Yet in the winter our house was still drafty, and we weren't sure what else we could do on our budget to improve matters.

Then last fall, my husband came across a notice from Arlington HEET (Home Energy Efficiency Team) seeking candidates for a "barn raising." This volunteer-run organization brings neighbors together to weatherize homes. We jumped at the opportunity, and soon met with Jeremy Marin, Arlington HEET's co-leader (and a UCS member).

Many Hands Make Light Work

To help prioritize tasks for the team's visit, Jeremy conducted a blower door test, in which a fan placed in the front door sucks air out of the home, revealing gaps that allow air into the home. We reviewed his recommendations and our budget (labor is free but the homeowner/tenant pays for materials) and outlined an action plan. Jeremy ordered the supplies and sent out a call for volunteers, emphasizing that no special skills were needed—only the willingness to learn and do a morning's worth of work in exchange for coffee and pizza. A few experienced men and women would serve as team leaders, training the volunteers and ensuring the work would be done well.



An Arlington HEET volunteer installs an energy-efficient ceiling fixture in Jennifer Norris's home.

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on a personal note

A Legacy Worth Preserving



Four decades ago, our waterways were choked with toxins, dangerous chemicals like lead and DDT put our health at risk, and industrial emissions hung heavy over our cities. This pollution endangered our quality of life. It was at this critical moment that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was born.

While it is hard to place a precise value on environmental health, there are many compelling examples of the EPA's success in cleaning up our country. Consider vehicle pollution, which has dropped 95 percent during the agency's existence—while the U.S. gross domestic product has grown 207 percent. Such pollution reductions have prevented millions of cases of disease and saved trillions of dollars in health care costs. And meeting stringent emissions standards has spurred a clean energy and technology industry that supports 1.5 million American jobs today.

As I look back at the EPA's accomplishments, I think about my daughters and how they deserve to see further improvements in the environment over their own adult lives. But the promise of such a future is in peril: polluting industries and their allies in Congress are trying to turn back the clock on environmental progress and block the EPA's ability to protect human and environmental health. In their attempt to weaken the agency's regulatory powers by painting critical environmental legislation as bad for the economy, these powerful interests flout established scientific facts about the causes and dangers of global warming, as well as facts about the costs of taking action versus maintaining the status quo. Other science-based air pollution regulations may also be at risk.

With our nationally recognized team of experts, UCS will defend the EPA's scientific legacy. In addition to testifying at hearings and submitting public comments, we will engage and work with public health advocates, medical professionals, scientists, economists, and activists to speak out. We will also actively expose the moneyed interests fueling the anti-science attacks. The message is clear: our elected officials must put the health and lives of people above short-term corporate profit, and to do so they must let the EPA do its job.


KEVIN KNOBLOCH, *president*

fast facts



The warming trend continues

Federal climate agencies announced that 2010 tied 2005 as the hottest year on record—the newest evidence of a dangerous trend:

- The decade 2001-2010 was the hottest on record, with 1991-2000 the second-hottest.
- Global average temperatures have risen 1.4 degrees Fahrenheit (°F) since the 1800s. This has resulted in the loss of Arctic summer sea ice, shifts in wildlife habitat, and severe flooding and drought.
- If we do nothing to reduce heat-trapping emissions, average temperatures are likely to increase another 4 to 10°F by the end of the century.
- If we reduce emissions quickly, we will still face some additional warming (about 3°F), but will have more cost-effective options available to address the consequences. 

Your Vote Supports UCS

UCS is honored to be one of 40 non-profits selected to receive donations from Working Assets/CREDO (a telecommunications and credit card company) in 2011. If you are a Working Assets/CREDO member or customer, please cast a vote for UCS at www.workingassets.com/voting; the more votes we get, the more funds we will receive to support our research, outreach, and advocacy activities.

Climate Science under Attack in Congress

What's at Stake

The integrity of science in federal climate policy decisions.

How You Can Help

Urge the new leaders of the House Science and Technology Committee to acknowledge and respond to the overwhelming scientific evidence about the threat of global warming.

What's Happening

With the science on global warming growing more urgent every day, we can't afford to ignore the likely impacts—we need government action. Unfortunately, the congressman who now oversees federal scientific research, Representative Ralph Hall (R-TX), claims there is a “dishonest undercurrent” in climate science, and has also stated his belief that all the money in the world “couldn't change nature's future one iota.”

As the new chairman of the House Science and Technology Committee, Representative Hall announced plans to search for what he calls the “real facts” on global warming—ignoring the reams of climate science data (including research by the government's own scientists) that the committee has already reviewed in recent years. Also troubling, he has named as his vice chair Representative Jim Sensenbrenner (R-WI), who has called climate change a “massive international scientific fraud.”

Rather than wasting time and taxpayer dollars debating the well-established existence of climate change and its impacts, Representatives Hall and Sensenbrenner should use their leadership positions in the committee to ensure the latest and best science informs federal climate policy, and




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to advance clean energy solutions that will reduce heat-trapping emissions while strengthening our economy.

What You Can Do

Contact Representatives Hall and Sensenbrenner and remind them that, as leaders of the House Science and Technology Committee, they are accountable to *all* Americans—including those outside their respective districts—who want to preserve the responsible use of science in policy

making. Given our nation's current environmental and economic challenges, it would be irresponsible to waste taxpayer dollars on baseless attacks on climate science that distract lawmakers from the real priority of reducing global warming emissions.

You can send an email from the online UCS Action Network at www.ucsusa.org/action, or call the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask to be connected to the House Science and Technology Committee. 

drawing conclusions



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A Clean Energy Barn Raising *(continued from front page)*


On a Sunday morning in early December, Jeremy arrived along with 20 volunteers and the group quickly divided up into small teams based on the skills they wanted to learn. Some installed professional-grade weather stripping around our windows and doors; others wrapped hot-water pipes in the basement, caulked cracks in the exterior of our foundation, or installed a collapsible balloon in the chimney to prevent air from escaping through the flue (which can be removed when we use the fireplace). My husband and I floated between teams, picking up pointers and giving the okay on certain actions.



The author helps the HEET volunteers weatherize her home.

A Tighter Home—and Community

In three short hours, Arlington HEET had sealed the equivalent of a six-inch square hole in our house. We also learned about some larger-scale projects that we need to address (hopefully in the years ahead) to further improve the energy savings. The experience yielded benefits beyond a more efficient home: we learned a great deal about our house, gained skills and confidence we can apply to future projects, and met some fellow residents who share our interest in energy and the environment. We look forward to “paying it forward” on Arlington HEET projects in the future.

Arlington HEET is just one of more than 20 organizations around New England that reduce energy consumption and global warming pollution in a concrete, community-oriented way, and more are popping up nationwide. For advice on organizing a HEET in your town or city, visit www.heetma.com/node/121. 

UCS on the web

Do you know where your power comes from? Most of us don't. Take the UCS “Burning Coal, Burning Cash” online quiz (www.ucsusa.org/powerquiz) to learn how utility companies are spending billions of dollars importing coal while neglecting energy efficiency and renewable energy. You can also call on your state's utilities to come clean about their energy choices.

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dialogue

What can you say to people who dismiss global warming when it is frigid or snowing heavily?

A few snowstorms or a cold snap during a short period of time do not prove much about climate change; they are simply the *weather* experienced in a specific location at a specific time. *Climate*, on the other hand, is the prevailing conditions—such as average temperature, precipitation, wind, humidity, and atmospheric pressure—observed over decades. Climate data show that global warming is already having profound effects on precipitation patterns, intensifying rain or snowfall in places accustomed to such precipitation, while decreasing precipitation in areas or times of the year that typically receive little. Ironically, this can lead to both drought and flooding at different times of year in the same location.

Climate observations over the past decades also show that precipitation changes can vary greatly by region. For example, warmer temperatures that have decreased ice cover on the Great Lakes generate heavier “lake-effect” snowstorms because the exposed lake water releases more moisture into the atmosphere. Many other U.S. locations, however, have seen a decline in the total land area covered with at least a dusting of snow for more than 30 days.

These impacts are likely to become even more pronounced in the decades ahead if heat-trapping emissions continue unabated. To learn more about our efforts to address global warming and its risks, visit the UCS website at www.ucsusa.org/blueprint. 