

## *The Grantham Prize for Excellence in Reporting on the Environment*

### **e<sup>2</sup>: the economies of being environmentally conscious Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent Chemical Fallout**

#### **2009 Award of Special Merit Recipients**

#### **e<sup>2</sup>: transport**

The news about climate change continues to be bleak. But with “e<sup>2</sup>: transport,” kontentreal shows us that some cities around the world are implementing changes to prevent or mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. The six-part series, part of “e<sup>2</sup>: the economies of being environmentally conscious” aired on PBS affiliates across the U.S.

The kontentreal team presented a novel perspective on how some cities are tackling sustainable transportation. Each episode explores global transportation innovations and the people behind these new approaches, including a public-private bike initiative in Paris that encourages residents to forego their cars to the pursuit of new technologies. Along the way, the team stopped by London, to investigate new approaches to charging for car travel; Portland, Oregon, consistently ranked as one of America’s most livable cities; and Seoul, which deconstructed a major city freeway to undertake a major environmental restoration project.

**Tad Fettig**, Director/Executive Producer, founded kontentreal with Karena Albers after a long career as a director of photography, producer director and executive producer in the advertising and independent film world. He worked for leading companies such as Scott Miller & Co., Propaganda and Pytka on campaigns for clients such as Mazda, AT&T, MCI and Ford, as well as programming for NBC Sports.

**Karena Albers**, Executive Producer, founded kontentreal in 2003 after more than 15 years as a high-level advertising executive for major clients such as Morgan Stanley, Exxon Mobil, and State Farm. She was founder and president of Integrated Marketing International and was group director for DDB Worldwide, the second largest advertising agency in the world. She is the original creator and executive producer of the PBS series, e<sup>2</sup>.

**Veronique Bernard**, Senior Producer, is a television producer with 25 years’ experience in non-fiction programming and broadcast journalism in the United Kingdom, Australia and the U.S. She is responsible for hundreds of hours of factual television for companies such as National Geographic Television & Film, New York Times Television, ABC News Productions, Condé Nast Media Group, WNET, WNYC, PBS, and Discovery Communications.

From the home page for the series, <http://www.pbs.org/e2> , viewers can link to extensive resources and Q&A for the classroom.

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### **Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent**

Canada is the fifth largest exporter of oil in the world and home to the world's largest energy project. Nikiforuk examines the tar sands of Alberta, Canada, and what they mean for the economy and the environment of Alberta and the world.

Every major oil company in the world has a lease in the tar sands, a naturally occurring phenomenon with sand, clay water and dense petroleum. Scientists and environmentalists see the refining of oil from the sands as one of the most environmentally destructive projects on earth.

The open-pit tar sand mines take up an area the size of New York City and bring in \$100 billion a year, and growing. Nikiforuk argues that the project is not only bad for Canada, but worse, constitutes a double-barreled threat to the planet as a whole.

**Andrew Nikifork** has written about energy, economics and the West for the last two decades. He has written for *The Walrus*, *Maclean's*, *Canadian Business*, and the *Globe and Mail's Report on Business*. In the late 1990s, he investigated the social and ecological impacts of intensive livestock industries and the legacy of northern uranium mining for the *Calgary Herald*. He currently writes a biweekly environmental column for the Alberta CBC and a monthly column for *Canadian Business*.

From the home page for the book, <http://www.dmpibooks.com/book/9781553654070>, readers can link to interviews, reviews, videos and an excerpt.

### **Discussion Questions from the Author**

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Is bitumen, the world's most expensive and carbon intensive commercial oil, a secure replacement for light oil?

To make one barrel of bitumen requires 12 barrels of water, four of which become waste. If all of North America consumed oil as water-intensive as bitumen, what would be the annual water cost for the continent?

Who is responsible for the carbon footprint of bitumen (generally three times that of conventional oil): the producer or the consumer?

How has the energy intensity of oil production changed in the last century?

Is the rapid development of Canada's tar sands a clear sign of peak oil?

Can unconventional hydrocarbons replace light oil and maintain business as usual in the North American economy?

Why does bitumen require extensive upgrading and refining?

What major U.S. multinationals have invested heavily in the tar sands?

Should China, the world's second largest consumer of fossil fuels after the United States, be allowed full access to the tar sands?

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### **Chemical Fallout**

Thirty years ago, a carcinogenic flame-retardant material was taken out of children's pajamas. In 2008 it was being used in baby carriers and bassinets. This was just one of several discoveries made by Susanne Rust and Meg Kissinger of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel in their series, Chemical Fallout.

The team exposed government programs that favored chemical makers over the public and conflicts of interests among regulators. They reported that there was no such thing as "microwave-safe" plastics. An outside laboratory tested containers labeled as such and found toxic levels of chemicals leached from every item. The team reviewed hundreds of scientific journal articles and worked with scientists to determine that the federal government's assurances that bisphenol A (a chemical compound found in many plastics) is safe are based on outdated U.S. government studies and research heavily funded by the chemical industry. David Kessler, former commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, said that the Sentinel was doing the work that the agency should have been doing all along to protect the public.

**Susanne Rust**, Senior Reporter, was part of a reporting team that won the 2008 Sigma Delta Chi award and the Society of American Business Writers and Editors award for detailing chemical dangers and lax regulations in Washington, D.C. Rust continued to break new ground throughout 2008 with more stories exposing the failures of the Environmental Protection Agency and Food and Drug Administration. Before joining the Sentinel, Rust pursued a doctorate in biological anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

**Meg Kissinger** is the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's investigative reporter focusing on health and welfare. She and two colleagues won the 2008 Sigma Delta Chi award and the Society of American Business Writers and Editors Award for a series of articles on government failure to screen for dangerous chemicals in household products. She has spent the last year breaking new ground on the failures of the EPA and FDA to regulate toxic chemicals.

From the home page for the series, <http://www.jsonline.com/watchdog/34405049.html>, readers can link to an audio slideshow, extensive follow up coverage, and a guide to minimizing one's chemical exposure.

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How should journalists report on science?

Should they critically examine scientific studies, as they would written laws, budgets, or other documents? Or, should they do a 'he said/she said' approach with an equal measure given to both sides? Are there really two sides in a science story?

What were the journalists writing about? Were they writing about the safety of the chemical? Or the body of evidence the government uses and looks at to create policy?

## **Chemical Fallout**

### **Discussion Questions from the Authors**

*continued*

How and why do you think industry pushed back so hard on these journalists?

If you were a journalist, how would you have responded? Why do you think Kissinger and Rust responded as they did?

How important were the details that they got by looking at e-mails between government agencies and industry scientists and what does that say about the importance of the Freedom of Information Act?

What role do journalists play in exposing the hidden agendas in the scrutiny of chemical safety?