

Julia Mottet

Comment written on 9/23/2020

I grew up, work and live in Cowlitz County, WA.

We have all been affected by the wildfires on the West Coast this year. We have seen the footage of the golden gate bridge obscured by smoke with a blood red sky. Portland had the worst air quality in the world last week. The fires have killed many people. Heartbreakingly, children as young as 1 year of age are among the victims. A thirteen-year-old boy died trying to save his grandmother. In the end, he was found alone, burned to death in a car with his beloved dog on his lap. Two years ago, we all watched in horror as the Camp Fire in Paradise, CA killed 86 people in a most terrifying manner.

According to Wikipedia, the 2020 Atlantic hurricane season, with 23 named storms so far, it is the second most active Atlantic hurricane season on record, only behind only the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season, (of Hurricane Katrina fame). Tropical Storm Cristobal and 19 later systems have broken the record for the earliest formation by storm number. In addition, this season is the first to see seven named tropical cyclones make landfall in the continental United States before September. September is not even over, and we've just experienced the most active September on record. With hurricane season not officially over until November 30, we may break the record yet for the most active hurricane season ever.

Last Friday, 9/18/2020, the rain came down so hard and fast that I had to use sandbags to keep the water away from my garage. I live half way up Columbia Heights Road. I am living in a house a block away from where I grew up. I've been here since the 1970s; my grandparents moved here in 1940. We have NEVER had to use sandbags in our lives up here on the hill. I only had the sandbags around to secure a portable basketball hoop for my children.

So between the pandemic, hurricanes, flash flooding, and a smoke-filled orange sky obscuring the sun, it feels like end times. Our face masks, bought for the pandemic, are doing double-duty due to the smoke. I do not know how to comfort my 14-year-old and 9-year-old daughters. I would like to be able to tell them that things will be okay, that people will realize what is happening and make big changes to prevent the destruction of our planet. But I cannot tell them that in good conscience. Global warming is happening; it's affecting our weather, which in turn affects our fire and hurricane seasons, and no amount of hand wringing, shoulder shrugging, head shaking, or hoping things will improve on their own is going to make it go away.

The proponents of the methanol refinery would have you believe that the refinery would decrease the amount of methanol derived from coal-based methods, thus creating a net reduction of greenhouse gases being produced. However, the Chinese have made NO written promises to decrease their coal-based activities if the Kalama methanol refinery were to be built; and even if they did make a written promise, it would be absolutely IMPOSSIBLE for us to enforce. Most certainly, they will simply add the methanol to all their other fuel stocks and coal will continue to be burned at the same rate in China. 'Displacement' is wishful thinking at best and false logic and deceptive propaganda at worst.

For years, NWIW claimed that the methanol would solely be used to produce feedstock for olefin production. This lie was told to make their numbers look for better. Well, there are less environmentally-destructive methods of producing feedstock than fracking natural gas, piping it over many hundreds of miles, refining it into methanol, and then shipping it half a world a way; therefore the comparison of fracked-gas-to-methanol vs. coal-to-methanol was always a sham comparison.

Now they finally admit that some of the methanol could be burned as fuel in China or elsewhere. Well no sh**, Sherlock! Methanol is a commodity and once it is manufactured and sold, the seller has no control over how or for what it is used. We should assume 100% could end up being burned as fuel, since we have no control of it once it leaves our shores.

The question is whether this proposed project is a net gain or net loss regarding greenhouse gas emissions... i.e. does it meet the current laws and standards that we have on the books to safeguard ourselves from planetary destruction?

When you consider all upstream emissions of this fracked gas project and how the methanol may end up being used, it is every bit as bad as coal, the very source NWIW claims to be replacing. This refinery would be a very significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. We cannot 'mitigate' our way out of the damage it will do to our planet. The damage would be immediate and ongoing; any so-called mitigation, such as planting trees that take decades to grow, would be too little, too late.

Taking into account ALL upstream emissions, the fact that the methanol may be burned as fuel, and no decrease in China's use of coal-derived methanol due to the aforementioned reasons of no-promise/no enforcement, this becomes a very bad project indeed.

I'm also very concerned about the additional tanker traffic on the Columbia River and what that will do to our salmon and other native fish.

Lastly, I think this refinery is an explosion hazard and too near families with children. All we need is a big earthquake and any safeguards put in place to prevent the methanol from coming in contact with oxygen will be breached. My 14-year-old daughter informs me that we are more than 50 years overdue for a big Cascadia subduction zone earthquake. Apparently we have become forgetful and complacent sometime during the last 300 years since the last one. We cannot afford to build a refinery on hope, as in "We hope the Big One doesn't hit during the lifespan of this refinery" or, "We hope the Chinese will burn less coal like they promised." As the framed wall poster that hung in my high school guidance counselor's office used to say, "Hope is not a form of birth control."

Julia Mottet
Longview, WA
9/23/2020