

Luncheon Speaker Roundup



Juan Reyes discusses the Health and Environmental program of the Dept. of Homeland Security.



William Kucharski describes the environmental effects of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.



Rick McCullough explains how the Mass Pike Authority responds to environmental incidents.

All three of this year's featured luncheon speakers have at least one thing in common – huge responsibility. The speakers offered insights from their experience managing large-scale environmental programs. Their presentations ranged in scope from regional to international: environmental incident response of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority; the environmental health and safety mission of the U.S. Homeland Security Department; and the international effort to redress environmental devastation caused by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait preceding the Gulf War.

TUESDAY

Meeting the Challenge: Standing Up a Safety, Health and Environmental Program at the Department of Homeland Security

In addition to the Herculean task of defending the nation's borders, the Homeland Security Department's Office of Safety and Environment has an environmental protection mandate. **Juan J. Reyes**, Director of the U.S. DHS Office of Safety and Environment, discussed the activities of the newly established office. His unit leads the effort to remediate parts of the delicate southwest desert ecosystem degraded by borderland smugglers who drive illegal roads through environmentally sensitive areas like the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge. Reyes also described the Department's ongoing effort to convert Federal Law Enforcement Training Center firing ranges into "total containment" facilities in order to decrease their environmental impact. Total containment ranges employ non-toxic, "green" bullets and have environmental decontamination systems installed to reduce to incidence of environmental lead exposure. These are just two examples of the Department's continuing commitment to the environment, he said.

WEDNESDAY

United Nations: How they Dealt with Iraq's Environmental Terrorism

Kuwait is in the midst of a lengthy and uncertain quest to collect millions of dollars in damages from Iraq for environmental devastation caused during the 1990 invasion. Kuwait now suffers from contaminated groundwater, spoiled coastal areas and hundreds of square miles of

land rendered lifeless by tarcrete deposits. Tarcrete, created by the soot rained down from hundreds of burning oil wells, forms an asphalt-like layer on the soil. "Even after regime change, Iraq is liable under environmental law for direct loss and environmental damage as a result of their actions," explains **William A. Kucharski**, Program Manager of the Kuwait M & A Program for the international environmental consulting firm Ecology & Environment, Inc. Kucharski described some of the challenges facing Kuwait: the enormity of the destruction; the environmental degradation of groundwater, soils and coastal areas; the scale of a proper cleanup project and the impediments coming from the UN. The UN, says Kucharski, may be setting a bad precedent for environmental terrorism remuneration because of the way it is handling Kuwait's claims. "So far the UN has secured only one quarter of the total damages owed by Iraq," he said.

THURSDAY

Mass Pike Emergency Preparedness and Response to Environmental Incidents

Rick McCullough is a juggler, a skillful multitasker. As Director of Environmental Engineering for the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, he depends on his ability to keep a lot of balls in the air. Between 40 and 50 reportable environmental incidents take place on the highway each year. The Mass Pike Authority is always on call to respond to these incidents and rapidly initiate the cleanup process. McCullough also discussed the Mass Pike Emergency Preparedness Plan. More than 20 departments were involved in the development of the plan, which included an analysis of all potentially vulnerable features of the highway (e.g. bridges, tunnels and tolls), a strategy for addressing the consequences of a terrorist attack, and the establishment of an emergency operations control center in Boston. The plan was reviewed in accordance with the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Capability Assessment for Readiness to ensure sufficient response capability should an incident occur along the heavily populated Mass Pike corridor. In the future, McCullough plans to use a GIS-based system to better identify and coordinate all of the agencies, localities, private industries and other entities that abut the linear landscape of the Mass Pike. 