Leading Gas Spewers

In 2000, the last year for which comprehensive data are available, the United States emitted a fifth of the world’s greenhouse gases, or 6928 million tons equivalent CO₂. China’s output almost equals those of India, Canada, Russia, and South Korea combined. The World Resources Institute created this map to show how different U.S. regions compare with top world emitters, with total emissions shown in millions of tons equivalent CO₂.

They Said It . . .

“In retrospect, the choice of entertainment was inappropriate for the occasion.”

—A statement from Australian National University in response to complaints about balloon- and lingerie-clad burlesque dancers who put on a show at the Australia New Zealand Climate Forum in Canberra, 5–7 September.

MOVE OVER, FIRE ANTS

A mysterious species of ant has invaded Houston, Texas, and no one knows where the creatures came from. The insects, of the genus Paratrechina, are known as “crazy ants” because of their frenzied movements. They are so numerous and aggressive that they’re driving away the notorious imported red fire ant. The crazy ants are a major headache for homeowners, and researchers fear they could also harm wildlife and endanger electrical equipment.

An exterminator first noticed the ants in 2002 and contacted Roger Gold, an urban entomologist at Texas A&M University in College Station. He and graduate student Jason Meyers are studying ways to control the ants but without much luck. “You can kill hundreds of thousands of ants, and the remaining ones walk over the cadavers and continue on their way,” Gold says.

The ants raised worries this summer when they crawled into circuit boards and shorted out a radiation scanner at the Port of Houston. They are now about 20 kilometers from NASA’s Johnson Space Center. Research on control is hampered by the fact that the Houston species hasn’t been identified yet. And it’s not clear whether the ants are agricultural pests, so the U.S. Department of Agriculture isn’t taking action.

TALLYING MIDEAST DAMAGE >>

Now that the bullets and bombs have largely stopped flying, the job of assessing the damage in Lebanon and Israel has begun. By comparing before-and-after satellite views, scientists at the European Union Satellite Centre in Madrid, Spain, and the Joint Research Centre in Ispra, Italy, have produced a tally of Lebanon’s destruction. More than 1500 buildings, 500 road sections, 500 cultivated fields, and 21 bridges were hit in southern Lebanon and Beirut. The scientists note that this is an underestimate because it only covers damage visible from space.

The environment was also a casualty. A major oil spill (right) has coated at least 150 kilometers of Lebanon’s beaches as a result of an Israeli attack on a coastal power plant in July. According to the World Conservation Union, samples of the 15,000 tons of oil that have washed ashore reveal a high concentration of cancer-causing aromatic hydrocarbons. Much oil has also sunk below the surface, posing further risks to the food chain and difficulties for the cleanup.

The Israelis’ assessment, reported on 30 August by the Ministry of Environmental Protection, says that Hezbollah rockets damaged 12,000 buildings or apartments, destroying 2000. Fires sparked by the rockets wiped out 1200 square kilometers of forest, including 70% of the Naftali mountain range, according to the ministry, which also cites damage to a wastewater treatment plant and the release of hazardous substances from storage facilities.