

Contact: Gretchen Hagle
Tennessee Environmental Council
(615) 248-6500
gretchen.tec@gmail.com

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June 17, 2010, Nashville, TN: The Sustainable Tennessee coalition will discuss the Oil Spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico and develop recommendations for actions Tennessee residents can take in response to this crisis at a meeting to be scheduled this August in Nashville.

“This is the one of worst environmental disasters our nation has faced, and it has direct impact for residents of Tennessee,” said Don Safer, Board Chair for the Tennessee Environmental Council. “Tennesseans are concerned and outraged about the situation. We have a huge number of residents who moved here after Hurricane Katrina, and many of us have family and friends in the Gulf area, so it is truly personal for us.”

Sustainable Tennessee was founded in 2007 and created a statewide Sustainability Agenda from the input of a broad coalition of citizens, conservation groups, environmental policy experts, elected officials, and representatives of private businesses, industry, and educational institutions. “We believe the crisis in the Gulf is a call to Tennesseans to be more serious about changing the way we live to a more sustainable lifestyle,” said Mary Mastin, Board Secretary, Tennessee Environmental Council, “And the Sustainable Tennessee Agenda is a roadmap to get there.”

One of the preliminary recommendations of the Sustainable Tennessee coalition is for individuals and businesses to take immediate steps to reduce dependence on fossil fuels. “People feel helpless to do anything about the situation in the Gulf. However, reducing fuel consumption is something everyone can easily do, and it will send a loud and clear message to Big Oil and Washington that this is not just ‘business as usual’. Consumers in Tennessee are heartbroken and furious about this situation.”

The Sustainable Tennessee Agenda includes specific suggestions to reduce fuel consumption. Sustainable transportation is a priority issue and the Agenda recommends using mass transit, and biking or walking at least once per month instead of using a car. On a policy level, the Agenda recommends TDOT revise its 25 year plan and 10 year investment plan to demonstrate a reduction in vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions for all new TDOT projects and to allocate highway funds for mass transit and other low-carbon mobility options for both passengers and freight.

Safer said, “There are many more things consumers can do to reduce fuel use such as eliminating unnecessary car trips, driving the speed limit, turning the car off instead of letting it idle when you are stopped, and driving a more fuel efficient vehicle.” The website DailyFuelEconomyTip.com lists more ideas. One very important practice to reduce fuel consumption is buying locally produced food and other products. Buying locally saves fuel, supports the local economy and ensures food security. Our food travels many miles from the field to the table, and it is often imported from halfway around the world.

The crisis in the Gulf also brings attention to our need to move away from fossil fuels and other unsustainable methods of producing energy. “Coal poses many risks. In Tennessee we are still trying to recover from the 2008 Kingston Coal Ash spill, which was 40 –100 times the size of the Exxon Valdez Alaska oil spill and will cost over a billion dollars to clean up with billions more to be spent on conversions to help prevent future incidents,” said Mastin, “It was a huge environmental disaster right here at home that many of us have already forgotten about, but the cleanup and recovery continues two years later.”

“Coal presents other risks. Most of our electricity in Tennessee comes from coal and a lot of that coal is coming from mountain top removal mining, a practice that needs to be stopped in Tennessee. If we are sickened by the situation in the Gulf, remember the 450 mountains in Appalachia that have been deliberately and irrevocably demolished to remove coal with devastating consequences for the communities, water quality, wildlife

and tourism in the area. The coal companies have their eyes on the mountains here in Tennessee,” said Mastin.

“We should not replace one environmental disaster for another, as is the risk with moving toward greater reliance on nuclear power plants,” said Safer, “That risk is so great, and the potential damage so huge that the operators of nuclear power plants are relieved of financial responsibility for a major accident by the Price Anderson Act. The Chernobyl meltdown in 1986 created a medical catastrophe that will continue to plague much of Russia, Belarus, the Ukraine, and Europe for many generations to come.”

The Sustainable Tennessee Agenda provides a roadmap for moving away from oil, coal and nuclear and moving toward clean, renewable energy sources and energy conservation. Signing up for TVA’s Green Power Switch® and/or Generation Partners® Program is another of the top priorities of the Agenda. These programs allow consumers and businesses to purchase renewable, clean power including solar, wind and methane gas and for those who are generating their own solar or renewable power, there are incentives from TVA.

Planting trees saves energy. The Agenda recommends planting a deciduous tree on the east, south or west of your home or building can save on cooling cost during the summer, and planting a row of evergreens on the north will block the cold north wind. “If applied nationwide to buildings currently not benefiting from trees, the shade could reduce our nation’s consumption of oil by 500,000 barrels of oil/day,” claimed the group American Forests in their publication *The Case For Greener Cities*, Autumn 1999.

The Tennessee Pollution Prevention Partnership program is also recommended in the Sustainable Tennessee Agenda. The program offers individuals and businesses the opportunity to learn and practice energy saving and pollution preventions techniques, and recognizes participants who achieve specific milestones.

Sustainable Tennessee also offers many opportunities to engage in policy and legislative issues to support clean, renewable energy. “A variety of Sustainable Tennessee coalition

members and supporters are doing excellent work on a local and national basis including Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, Repower America, Solar Valley Coalition, and more,” said Safer, “These groups offer a variety of letters and petitions to let our leaders in Tennessee and Washington know that we want to invest in a clean energy future. There are lots of ways that Tennesseans can engage in the political process to effect change here and nationally.”

Ultimately the message from the Sustainable Tennessee coalition is one of hope. There are actions that we can take here in Tennessee that will make a difference. “We believe the tragedy in the Gulf will open more eyes to the dire and urgent need to change the way we live in relationship to the Earth,” said Safer, “Sustainable Tennessee offers opportunities to take action, and we invite everyone to attend our meeting in August to learn more. More information can be found at www.sustainabletn.org”

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Sustainable Tennessee www.SustainableTN.org was founded in 2007 and created a statewide Sustainability Agenda including the input of a broad coalition of citizens, conservation groups, environmental policy experts, elected officials, and representatives of private businesses, industry, and educational institutions. The coalition meets throughout the year and will host their fourth annual Summit for a Sustainable Tennessee in November.

The Tennessee Environmental Council www.tectn.org educates and advocates for the conservation and improvement of Tennessee’s environment, communities and public health. The Council works on projects including Duck River Opportunities Project, the Tennessee Tree Project, and Sustainable Tennessee.