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SEASON'S GREETINGS TO ALL OUR READERS!

1. The celebration in the northern hemisphere of the passing of the darkest day may be a short-term metaphor for global economic and environmental affairs. In the longer term, greater uncertainty prevails in both areas. It is heartening to see the beginnings of some recognition of a major, perhaps the major, underlying issue: global population growth (news270, 267, 243 etc). David Attenborough's television programme "How Many People Can Live on Planet Earth?" (BBC2 Horizon 9-12-09) was to his usual excellent standard and can be seen on BBC iPlayer via www.bbc.co.uk.

2. Apart from economic and environmental affairs, moral issues seem to be more and more important in a crowded and competitive world. We are warned to be wary of internet scams and false offers of low-price purchases, which can lead to harvesting your financial details and selling them on in order to steal your savings. Be especially wary in the Christmas season!

3. Revolt came into being in 1991 as a response to the infamous corporation Enron, lead partner in the 1845MW gas-fired Teesside Power Station. Enron's immoral actions played a leading part in the global financial crash around the millennium. This time round it's the financial speculators and their excessive risk-taking which have fleeced us all. As population and human mobility increase, expect global crime to be a major growth area!

4. Still on the morality theme, news282.6-9 updated the case of Dermot Finnigan and the National Grid 400kV line at Sale. The update ended by saying "What seems to me to be needed is a corporate approach and culture with greater common decency". Dermot reports 10-12-09 that NG responded via their lawyer to "say they will take me to court if I continue to complain" and "they say the matter has been considered by the courts (which is wrong) and the matter is closed". He adds "all I ever asked of NG was help". Sadly, this looks like the end of the road, in spite of the confirmation from DfT. National Grid appear to be unaccountable for erecting their pylon in an "unauthorised" position, with the Finnigans bearing the brunt of it. Not only unaccountable, but also unrepentant it seems, and unable to achieve that corporate common decency. Shame on you, National Grid!

5. From the maps provided in the Finnigan case (with news282 and 250), it does look like the authorised pylon position may be displaced some seven metres perpendicular to the conductors towards Dermot's land (as well as some 25m parallel to them),

compared with the unauthorised position where the pylon was built. Therefore with the pylon in the authorised position it seems almost certain the conductors would clearly oversail the corner of Dermot's land, and hence would have entitled him to compensation as a grantor. This does have the appearance of NG using the unauthorised position in order to avoid compensation.

6. Since the compensation aspect of the Finnigan case was not mentioned in the summary of effects in news282.8, here is an updated summary, based on those maps. The unauthorised relocation had the following effects:

- (1) preserving the condemned houses for the benefit of the golf club contrary to Trafford Council planning policy;
- (2) preserving the condemned houses for occupation by golf club employees and their families with excessive EMF exposure;
- (3) avoiding the conductors cutting the corner of the Finnigans' land and thereby avoiding compensating them.

Once again, shame on you, National Grid!

7. The long-running petition PE812 to the Scottish Parliament (news274, 269 etc), on powerlines and health, was reviewed 1-12-09 and received supporting statements from some MSPs with reference to recent research. The reviewing committee concluded that the petition should be kept open and recent submissions should be sent to the Scottish Parliament for response by 6-1-10. There were suggestions that the government announcement on the Beaully-Denny proposal could now be delayed.

8. An interesting new paper by Oberg & Peltola [Atmospheric Environment DOI: 10.1016/j.atmosenv.2009.09.009] finds increased deposition of pollutant PCBs in pine needles near powerlines. As the location is in Swedish forests, the results may be relatively free from confounding from human sources. Such deposition is consistent with Henshaw's work on corona ion effects, and could apply to many other pollutants.

9. Problems of probity in science (news286.1/2/9/10 etc, etc.) continue to damage public trust. A new example concerns the billions of dollars spent stockpiling neuraminidase inhibitors (Tamiflu), as reported in BMJ 8-12-09. It seems assessment of the drug was based on ten "independent" studies all funded by the manufacturer and only two of them published, while negative results were unpublished and side-effects were not weighed against the possible (and doubtful) benefits. A 10-12-09 article from theatlantic.com reports ghost writers were employed by the manufacturer's marketing department to write up published scientific studies to ensure key commercial messages are included. That's the way of the world!

http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/339/dec07_2/b5106

<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200912u/tamiflu>

10. Daily Telegraph 13-12-09 (Alistair Jamieson) reports "*A warning about the health effects of noise from wind turbines was removed from a government study following pressure from civil servants.*" More problems of probity in science, reminiscent of the BSE affair! The article goes on "*Consultants recommended lowering night-time noise limits because the sounds made by spinning blades were enough to disrupt sleep patterns. However, the advice, contained in a draft version of their 2006 report, was removed from the final submission which was eventually used in official guidance for local authorities ruling on planning applications from wind farm developers*" and

“Evidence of the changed advice was uncovered after a two-year battle using the Freedom of Information Act by campaigners opposed to a wind turbine development close to their home at in mid-Devon”.

11. In the case of wind turbine noise, like the David Nutt affair on cannabis, the answer should be simple: separate the scientific assessment (like the harm of drugs, or the effect of turbine noise) from the political response (like the classification of drugs and consequent legal penalties, or the statutory guidance on approving wind turbines), and let the scientific assessments be freely published. Simple!

12. And finally ... PLEASE TAX ME !!

Given the financial problems facing many national governments after the recession, there could be value in a per-minute tax on mobile phone use. Naturally there would be exemptions for vital and emergency services. The effect could reduce excessive individual usage without injuring the viability of the booming industry. The benefits might include: substantial increased national revenue; reduced personal EMF exposure; improved road safety (less distracted driving); reduced idiotic anti-social use in public; improved efficiency of business communications. So go on, Mr Chancellor, tax me with your fiscal stick, tax me, tax me, TAX ME !!