

## Misconceptions about American responsibilities

With the failure of the top kill attempt by BP to stop the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico the cries to have the American government take over are becoming louder and louder. President Barack Obama put it well when he said he had the best minds available working on the problem, but that it was BP's responsibility to stop the leak and pay for the cleanup.

What has been missed in much of the coverage of this terrible event is the oil platform that sank in the Gulf was outside the direct control of the U.S. as it technically was in international waters. Under the sea agreements through the United Nations the country has a right to control who gets to drill off their shore, but that far off the American coast the government has limited authority to regulate the drilling process. The Coast Guard did an inspection of the platform with the permission of the company, but could not require the company to comply with specific regulations. The company said the safety mechanisms were in place to prevent an accident, but when the platform exploded and sank that mechanism did not function properly to shut down the well.

British Petroleum – known as BP – purchased Standard Oil companies a number of years ago and became a player in the American oil business. The truth is drilling has been going on in the Gulf for many years, and this is the worst disaster faced by the oil industry. We hope a combination of minds can find a solution, but listening to those who seem to know, the best hope is the drilling of the relief well that will take at least another five to eight weeks. That is being done, and efforts to reduce the amount leaking would help reduce the ongoing damage.

After 45 days of oil spewing from 5,000 feet down people are looking for answers and for someone to stand up and solve the problem. As it takes longer to find an answer the finger pointing is turning toward the Obama administration. Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar has said he is moving ahead with the best plans the department has, and is looking to reorganize the Minerals Management Service to make it less of a front for the oil industry as it has been since the Bush administration and the policies created at the closed door meetings held by Vice President Dick Cheney.

In the end the environment along the Gulf coast is being damaged daily, and no pointing of blame is going to solve the problem. The people of the United States can blame every level of the oil business and government, but the most we can really do is pray the best minds find new and better ways to deal with the cleanup, and send the bills to the oil company in charge.

– Tom Betz

## Let me explain

Now, before you start lecturing me about the dangers of picking up hitchhikers, let me explain. It was Sunday morning and I was almost late to church. Jim was at an antique show, so I was going by myself.

Six miles from town I spotted three young women sitting by the side of the road. No vehicle, not even a bicycle, in sight. At first I drove by. But, my conscience wouldn't let me continue.

I pulled off the road; flipped a "U" turn; and drove back to the intersection where the girls were, by now, waving in hopes of getting my attention. When I asked if they were having any trouble they answered, in a distinct French accent, "No trouble. We are just trying to get to the next town. We have walked all this way and no one will stop."

At first I tried to make the excuse that I would be late for church, but then, I thought, "What would be the more Christian thing to do. Go to church or help these young women?"

"Hop in," I said. "I'll give you a ride to the next town." They were so grateful. And, we had a lovely visit as we drove. See, I would have missed meeting these beautiful girls had I not turned around. I learned they were 20, 21 and 22 years of age. They had been studying cinematography in New York for the past year, but they wanted to see America before their return to France. They had taken a train from New York to Chicago and hitchhiked from Chicago to here. Their plan is to hitchhike to Denver; Denver to Las Vegas; fly back to New York; then home to Paris.

I asked if their parents were okay with what they were doing. And, Ophelia,

### Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



who was in the front seat, therefore the spokesperson for the group, said, "Not so much. But, what can they do?"

Oh, to be that young and unafraid. Willing to venture out into the unknown. I admire them for their courage and am a little (just a little) remorseful for not having done something wild and crazy like that when I was their age.

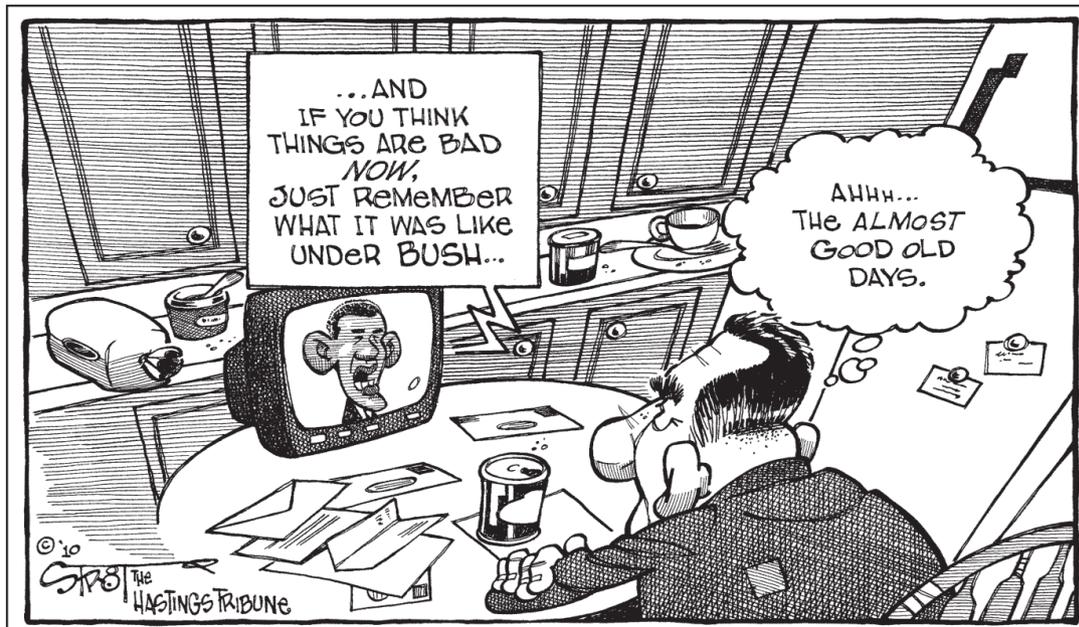
Wait a minute. Maybe I did. By the time I was their age, I was married, had a baby and was waiting for my soldier-husband to come home from a war. That was pretty wild and crazy.

I dropped Marion, Gaelle and Ophelia off at a convenience store with the admonition to stay together and be careful. I also told them how to distinguish the difference between poisonous and non-poisonous snakes. They gave me their e-mail addresses (isn't technology wonderful) so I will forward this on to them.

Finally on my way to church, I decided to call the sheriff's office. I asked if they could arrange with the next county west to transport the girls at least to the county line. Sure hope that worked out for them.

Just a little insurance in case they didn't find a ride.

I can hardly wait to hear the "rest of the story."



## Planting your pets

### Vet tips Amber

Nuttycomb, RVT



Hi, my dog keeps eating grass like crazy! Then he comes in the house and throws it up! Help me! What is wrong with him and why is he eating grass?

This is a call we occasionally get here at Norton Animal Health Center, but there is no scientific proof as to why pets do this. Eating grass is a normal behavior of many dogs, and cats too. Yet nobody really knows why animals ingest grass. Some say their stomach is upset while others say it is because a storm is brewing! Eating the grass itself is not harmful to a pet. It is the stuff that may be on it. Some animals are highly allergic to the different grasses we have in our yards. If a pet would ingest the grass and is allergic it might get an upset stomach or break out in hives as a person would. The only way to confirm what a pet is allergic to is by doing tests that define the allergy. Another reason to worry about pets eating grass is when it is sprayed for weeds.

Everyone hates the time of year when dandelions and henbit invade the yard. Weed killers and preventives are highly toxic to pets and humans. If people walk in the yard, they have shoes and clothing on to protect from absorbing the toxins. Animals don't have shoes and don't wear clothes. If an animal does have pet clothing, it is not thick enough to protect from toxins.

Here is an everyday scenario. Mom scheduled the yard spray for 3 p.m. because that was the only time free. The kids come home from school and let the dog outside, not realizing the yard was sprayed just 45 minutes ago. Mom and

dad are still at work and won't be home for a while to tell the children. What the kids don't know is that they are putting themselves and the dog at risk.

It takes two to three hours for the poison to be entirely absorbed into the plant. In more humid areas one may be advised to wait until the spray has completely dried. That may take several hours. So next time you spray for bugs or weeds, prepare your whole family with clear instructions of what to do when.

What about the pretty flowers? People don't want to plant anything that would jeopardize the well being of their pet. Everyone should check with the local poison control or research poisonous plants before landscaping the yard. Every fall bulbs are planted with the hope that next spring the yard will be a bright array of flowers.

Lilies, daffodils, hyacinths, oh my! These easy-to-grow flowers are very toxic to animals. Daffodils contain an ingredient called lycorine that can trigger vomiting.

If a pet ingests any part of the plant or bulb, diarrhea, abdominal pain or even heart problems may result. All lilies are highly toxic to cats. Just a small amount of pollen, or as little as two to three petals of the flower may cause kidney failure,

and death. Tulips contain allergenic lactones, and hyacinths contain similar alkaloids. The toxic principle of these plants is concentrated in the bulbs, as opposed to the leaf or flower.

Pet owners should prevent dogs from digging up and eating these bulbs. When ingested, the bulbs can irritate the mouth and esophagus. Typical signs of toxicity include profuse drooling, vomiting and diarrhea. With a large amount of bulb ingestion, more severe symptoms, such as an increase in heart rate and changes in respiration, may be seen. These severe cases require immediate treatment.

The weeds have been killed and the bulbs have been planted. What next? Fertilize! Most fertilizers cause a mild stomach irritation, while others can be fatal. The best way to keep a pet out of fertilizer is to store it in tightly sealed containers high out of reach. Blood meal fertilizers may cause vomiting, diarrhea or pancreatitis. Bone meal, when ingested, can cause a large ball of cement that can obstruct the bowels, with the potential for emergency surgery the only cure. Rose and plant fertilizers contain disulfon or other organophosphates. All it takes is a teaspoon of 1 percent disulfon to kill a 55 pound dog. Organophosphates can cause symptoms of excessive salivation, urination, dehydration, seizures or possibly death.

Remember, when tending to and preparing the yard for the best landscape award, be mindful of pets. The goal is to plant flowers and to have healthy pets as well. For any questions please don't hesitate to give us a call at 877-2411.

## Rich with knowledge

### Insight

John Schlageck

The farm has always been a fertile field for producing crops, but it is also an environment rich with learning experiences.

For generations, children that grow up and work with their parents on the family farm have learned valuable skills about cultivating crops. While they are learning to sow seeds, cultivate weeds and harvest grains, flowers and vegetables, they are also cultivating knowledge.

Lessons learned on the farm include math, social studies and vocabulary, leadership, not to mention cooperation and responsibility.

All those skills acquired in a simple field of soil and vegetation?

Absolutely. Tucked away in those vast acres of grass and crops there's a living outdoor classroom teeming with lessons on life. Children who learn to till the soil come to understand such basics as distance, depth and height. They learn that the bounty of plants that bears our food came from places all over the world – rice from the Far East, wheat from Russia, etc.

They see stems, leaves, seeds, flowers and bulbs in their hands, instead of in a book – an enduring way to plant words in their vocabulary.

While growing up with a land whipped by the wind, warmed by the sun and cooled by the stars, youngsters learn to respect their environment. They learn that by caring for this fertile land, it will in turn care for them.

Such a valuable learning experience can provide children with the tools likely to influence family and friends to respect the land as well. or at least raise

their level of awareness. Youngsters also learn that hope is not wishful thinking of harvest success. Rather, hope is the action of planning and planting seeds. There will be those years when harvest may not occur, but the seeds of hope must be planted if there is even the thought of next year's bounty.

Learning outside can also be fun. If you don't think so, ask children who've been on a field trip. They appreciate the opportunity to spend a day in a natural classroom where they can trade fluorescent lighting and four walls for blue sky and white clouds overhead.

When given the opportunity to grow grains, flowers and vegetables, youngsters chart the progress of the plant. They invest in the outcome and that means harvesting their hard work, care and investment.

While encouraging students to consider growing and caring for a small plot with wheat, roasting ears or assorted vegetables, be sure to equip them with youth-sized tools. Remember they are still youngsters and do not possess the strength, knowledge and wisdom of an adult.

Suggest themes for young gardeners. Have them pick out a favorite story character – Peter Rabbit for example.

Try a garden theme that appeals to a child's literal sense, such as an alphabet garden with plants that begin with the letters A to Z. They could also plant a

pizza garden and grow tomatoes, peppers and onions.

They could visit a dairy farm to learn about the fundamentals of caring for cows that produce the milk that results in cheese on the pizza. Or maybe a visit to a cattle ranch to experience beef cattle being cared for that ultimately winds up as hamburger on a pizza.

Direct the children and instill in them that caring for a crop can be an adventure. Have them add excitement to the garden with decorations including scarecrows, painted stumps and tiles and child-sized benches.

Be certain not to put actions children would naturally attempt to do off limits. Encourage them to dig in the soil for earthworms. Tell them to pick the flowers – when they're mature. Have them pick up stones and play in the water on a hot, sticky day.

Above all, make certain the learning experience is enjoyable. Teach the children to make up songs about gardening and sing them together while working. Encourage them to keep a daily journal about each day's activity.

Take pictures of the learning journey in the field and add them to the journal. Yes, there can be an abundance of lessons to be harvested in the soil. Take the opportunity to provide such an experience for a child you know.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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