

ADVERTISEMENT



Unlimited Local & Long Distance Calling | **\$9.95/MO** for the first 3 months of service

CLICK HERE

Vonage

Activist crusades against toxic waste in Russia

Anastasia Ustinova, Chronicle Foreign Service
Sunday, April 19, 2009

PRINT E-MAIL SHARE COMMENTS (4) FONT | SIZE: - + TOOLS SPONSOR: 

(04-19) 04:00 PDT Moscow - --

The residents of Chapaevsk, a city in Central Russia, say the lakes near local chemical factories are dead from toxic waste, no longer freeze and contaminate the town's water supply.

IMAGES



John Antonelli

[View Larger Image](#)

MORE NEWS

- [Officials: Violence kills 12 in northwest Pakistan](#) 04.20.09
- [Pirates free food aid ship, another ship attacked](#) 04.20.09
- [Union approves cutting 90 Chronicle driver jobs](#) 04.19.09

In the western Russian city of Dzerdjinsk, the mortality rate of children and adolescents is 50 percent higher than the national average because of pollution from chemical plants. The city is one of the world's 10 most-polluted places, according to the Blacksmith Institute, a consulting firm in New York.

Such environmental disasters are well-known thanks to Olga Speranskaya, a petite, 46-year-old physicist who is the driving force behind a nongovernmental group that works to identify, reduce and safely store chemical stockpiles in Russia and the republics of the former Soviet Union. For her tireless work, she is being honored with the Goldman Environmental Prize.

Many of the former Soviet republics house outdated and highly poisonous chemicals that were used during the agricultural boom years after World War II.

"Our aim is to clean the country of toxic waste," Speranskaya told The Chronicle in a recent interview in Moscow. "The major part of what we do is under government jurisdiction and that's why explaining and showing them ways to resolve the pressing environmental problems is our ultimate goal."

For more than a decade, Speranskaya, the head of Moscow's Center for Environment and Sustainable Development, or Eco-Accord, has fought lax environmental regulations, local bureaucracies and corporations.

"Obviously, some people don't like what she does," said Islam Mustafayev, chairman of the ecological group Ruzgar in Baku, Azerbaijan. "Local government or private companies try to disrupt her projects."

Mustafayev says environmental organizations in Russia and former Soviet republics often have difficulty obtaining government permits to collect water and soil samples or gain access to contaminated areas.

Speranskaya's career as an activist began in the early 1990s after the Financial Times published her essay on the environmental implications of the collapse of the Soviet

MOST COMMENTED MOST READ MOST E-MAILED

1. [Disbelief among those who know Tracy suspect](#)
2. [Obama says reaching out to enemies strengthens US](#)
3. [Lessons from the Great Depression](#)
4. [Teen arrested in fatal shooting in Oakland](#)
5. [City fees for One Rincon unlikely to be paid](#)
6. [Crocs - such a guilty pleasure](#)
7. [Tolls on Bay Area bridges likely to increase](#)

TopJobs

HUMAN RESOURCES

Join us at The Port of Oakland!!!
[Port of Oakland](#)

INTERNSHIPS

Summer 2009 Internships!!!!
[Metropolitan Transportation Commission - MTC](#)

REAL ESTATE

A Sutter Affiliate
[Palo Alto Medical Foundation](#)

SALES

EXECUTIVES Company
IMSM Ltd

SERVICE

SALES REPRESENTATIVE

EDUCATION

Administrator III
Academic Affairs
[CalPoly](#)

ENGINEERING

A Great Opportunity!!!!
[Michael Baker Jr. Corporation](#)

Union.

Her essay noted that the postwar agricultural boom produced stockpiles throughout the Soviet Union of dangerous chemicals known as Persistent Organic Pollutants, which were used to boost fruit and vegetable production. Left unguarded, the toxins can cause birth defects, respiratory problems, cancer and behavioral disorders among other health problems.

In 1999, Speranskaya's Eco-Accord joined a worldwide effort to curb production and use of hazardous chemicals through a global treaty called the Stockholm Convention. The accord has been ratified by at least 128 nations and the majority of former Soviet states.

Then-President Vladimir Putin signed the convention in 2002, but the Russian Federation has yet to ratify it. Bureaucratic delays and lack of resources have left Russia with few regulations to oversee thousands of chemical and energy plants, Eco-Accord says.

"Until the government realizes its importance, it's not going to ratify it," said Olga Ponizova, program coordinator at Eco-Accord.

Meanwhile, Speranskaya continues her efforts with local governments to find and store pesticides and rewrite lenient environmental regulations. As a result, Eco-Accord is mapping out contaminated areas, conducting public health research and coordinating cleanups with dozens of local groups and governments in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus region and Central Asia.

In the Azerbaijani city of Sumgait near the Caspian Sea, for example, Eco-Accord is attempting to decontaminate one of the most polluted cities of the former Soviet Union. Sumgait was once the industrial hub of chemical and heavy metal production, employing hundreds of thousands of workers.

Ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, at least 70 percent of the population suffered from chemical-related illness due to stockpiles of chlorine, DDT and other chemicals, health officials said.

Currently, Eco-Accord is working with nongovernmental organizations to stage public-awareness campaigns in schools and on television, conduct research and cleanup programs and advise legislators how to write laws to safeguard the environment.

"Speranskaya is one of the most professional, disciplined and dedicated people I've ever worked with," said Mustafayev. "She created a potent network of NGOs that has helped transform the region."

E-mail Anastasia Ustinova at foreign@sfchronicle.com.

This article appeared on page **A - 18** of the *San Francisco Chronicle*

PRINT E-MAIL SHARE

Comments (4) View Comments »

Share your thoughts on this story.

Add Your Comment

You must be signed in to add a comment. [Sign In](#) | [Register](#)

Text input field for comments

Submit

Most Recommended Comments

huntingguy

About Top Jobs View All Top Jobs Search more Jobs



REAL ESTATE



Custom home has best of many worlds

Known as Montevigna, the new home at 1124 Kenilworth Ave. in Kenwood is a blend of old and new, mountains and valleys. Jon Reiter, owner of...

- Landlord can change rent due date with notice Mortgage rates close to record lows New fees, rules roil home-loan market

Search Real Estate »

CARS



Van Ness lights functioning again

What's working again S.F. lights: Numerous cliches could be used - including "let there be light" - but a simple statement says it best...

- Showdown for global automakers Fresh take on the passenger car Photo: Car Gallery: Submit your photos

Search Cars »

JOBS



Racial bias case may affect hiring policies

Inside a burning building, fire doesn't discriminate between Matthew Marcarelli and Gary Tinney. Inside the New Haven Fire Department...

- Actor's union board endorses deal with studios COBRA help for small biz workers Cross-training makes better coworkers

Search Jobs »

ADVERTISERS

Equifax can help you monitor your credit score

Hawaii Getaways \$399 + 3 Nights with Air

Join the Chronicle Wine Club. Only \$39.95 per month!



4/19/2009 7:57:05 AM

YES!!! Send the environmentalists to Russia; then Venezuela, then Columbia. Go now..

Recommend: (1)

(0)

[\[Report Abuse\]](#)

[View Comments \(4\)](#)

INSIDE SFGATE



You Call This Building Short?

Structure proposed for next to Pyramid face many problems.



Corporate Ladder

It's the Chron 200. See how firms are coping, who's on top. **(Hint: This guy)**



Rockin' At Coachella

M.I.A. and others at the Indio music fest. **Photos.**

Ads by Yahoo!

Corporate Cleaners

Customized Janitorial Services from a Leading Metro NY Area Provider.
(www.CapitalCleaningContractors.com)

Personal Trainers New York City

Find serious personal training in New York City. Get in shape now with the help of experienced and professional personal trainers. Work out at home or in a gym.
(www.personaltrainersnyc.com)

Medical Waste Disposal

Bio Hazardous Waste Services. New York - Start Saving Money Today.
(www.hwsusa.com)



[Subscribe to The Chronicle](#)

[Home](#) | [News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Business](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Food](#) | [Living](#) | [Travel](#) | [Columns](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Cars](#) | [Site Index](#)

[\[return to top\]](#)

Advertising Services: [Place a Classified](#) | [Advertise in Print](#) | [Advertise Online](#) | [Media Kit](#) | [Public Notices](#)

Reader Services: [Home Delivery](#) | [Subscribers](#) | [Mobile](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [Newsletters](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Buy Photos](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Corrections](#) | [Get Us](#)

Company Info: [Contact Us](#) | [Hearst Corp.](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms and Conditions](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Chronicle in Education](#) | [Events & Promotions](#) | [Submissions](#)

© 2009 Hearst Communications Inc.

HEARST newspapers