

War, Big Oil and the Inconvenient Truths About Military Air Shows

By [Dr. Gary G. Kohls](#)

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The Big Oil cartels have, for decades, been poisoning the Gulf of Mexico, the Persian Gulf and many other ocean floors with millions of gallons of toxic crude oil via their risky, and very leaky deep water oil wells. It wasn't just the crime against the planet that British Petroleum and Dick Cheney's Halliburton perpetrated in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. There are many other things that have contributed to the mortal wounding of the Gulf.

A good example of the damage done to the Gulf by corporate entities includes the Mississippi River delta's massive dead zone that has been extending rapidly into the Gulf for decades, thanks to the many shoreline polluters that have been dumping toxins into the river all the way back to the headwaters in "environmentally friendly" Minnesota.

There are hundreds of dead zones at the mouths of many of the world's major rivers, but the pollution that caused the huge dead zone at the Mississippi's mouth started with the over-fertilization and over-application of highly toxic herbicides and pesticides on Upper Midwest farmlands. (See www.geoengineeringwatch.com for more details.)

Carcinogenic corporate waste products that are dumped directly into the river or otherwise seep into the ground water are known to sicken and then kill living creatures downstream. As I was growing up, I fished in the Minnesota River and I witnessed the beginnings of the near-fatal wounding of that river because of massive corporate farm chemical runoff. The Minnesota went from swimmable and fishable to muddy, smelly, toxic and relatively fishless during the years in which I was coming of age..

So far the corporate criminals in the Big Oil, Big Chemical and Big Agribusiness industries have been making disastrous economic decisions, but they keep getting off with barely a slap on the wrist for heavily contributing to the slow death of our poisoned planet. And all of a sudden, just like Wall Street's Big Bank predatory lenders, who had controlling power in the Cheney/Bush administration (and who also got off scot-free with the pre-meditated murder of the economy in 2008), are now back to business as usual in the Obama administration, awarding themselves lavish bonuses and getting everything they want from our bribed legislators and co-opted Supreme Court justices.

These sociopaths could just as well be saying to us:

"to hell with the long-term sustainability of Mother Earth. And to hell with you peasants in the lower 99% who depend on Mother Earth's health. We in the upper 1% have got our politicians, our lawyers, our judges, our gated communities and our body guards, and we dare you to try to take any of it away from us."

Whatever the highly paid lobbyists from Big Business tell us in their ever-present Big Media staged interviews, the only things that really matter to them and their paymasters is shareholder value, the next quarter's profit report and today's share prices (that they hope will not be adversely affected by the rather regular revelations of criminal or unethical activities).

Big Oil Isn't the Only Industry that Has Been Polluting the Air and the Water

Of course, the history of petroleum pollution of the once pristine, fertile and life-giving waters of the Gulf of Mexico didn't just start with Big Oil's inadvisable deep water drilling.

In 1946, flush with pride at winning WWII, the US Department of the Navy established a base of naval air operations on the shores of the Florida Gulf. For the purpose of recruiting pilots to the Navy and raising unit morale it started performing airshows for the public and the Blue Angels flying team was born. The Gulf has been its base of operations ever since, first at Jacksonville, Florida (until 1950), then at Corpus Christi, Texas (from 1950 to 1954), and finally at its permanent home at Pensacola.

The Angels began petro-poisoning the Gulf when the Navy found it advisable to have its fighter jets dump excess fuel over the Gulf just prior to landing thus decreasing the already remote possibility of a lethal fireball engulfing the pilot in case of a crash landing. No records seem to have been kept to quantify the volume or frequency of such fuel dumps, and, simply out of ignorance or arrogance, no environmental impact study was ever considered.

JP-5 Jet Propellant is Highly Toxic Whether Burned or Dumped

The current Blue Angels F-18s use a highly toxic propellant fuel, the most recent permutation of which is called JP-5. And the many additives do not burn clean, no matter what the Pentagon says.

JP-5 is actually a refined kerosene that also contains a mixture of volatile organic compounds (VOCs), some of which are known carcinogens (cancer-causing) as well as being toxic to liver, kidney and immune systems.

The post-combustion exhaust from jet engines is an equally carcinogenic pollutant of air, water and soil that is poisonous to human and non-human animals as well as plant and aquatic life.

The military personnel who handle the JP-5 fuel are at high risk of being poisoned by inhaling the raw fumes or the engine exhaust. Those exposed can easily develop, in a delayed fashion, chronic illnesses because of the toxicity of the VOCs.

The Sobering Economics of Military Air Shows

The fuel consumption data for the US Navy's Blue Angel and USAF Thunderbird air shows are generally kept somewhat secret – and for good reason. The alarmingly high fuel consumption would tend to dampen the enthusiasm of all but the most patriotic and thrill-seeking ticket-buyers.

The aviation industry says that JP-5 jet fuel costs 2-3 times more than automotive fuel which

has been averaging \$4/gallon. Therefore, JP-5 costs the Pentagon between \$8 and \$12/gallon!

A few years back the Blue Angels were in my hometown of Duluth, MN, headlining the biannual air show. A local journalist was given a publicity ride before the show and wrote in his column that the jet he rode in burned 1,200 gallons (8,000 pounds) of fuel per hour. That number should startle everybody, for 1200 gallons of fuel for a fuel-efficient car that gets 40 mpg would cover 48,000 miles and cost \$4,800 if you were paying \$4/gallon. If you were driving 10,000 miles per year, the amount of fuel that that Blue Angel jet burns up in one hour would fuel your car for almost 5 years.

1,200 gallons of JP-5 would cost \$12,000 at \$10/gallon. Multiply that by 6 (the number of jets in each performing team) and you get \$72,000 as the actual fuel costs of a one hour show. And that doesn't factor in the fuel costs for the round trip to Florida for each of the 70 air shows that the Blue Angels do in a typical year. Do the math if you can and you will start to rethink the need for such environmentally-insensitive entertainment events.

Eight USAF Thunderbird F-16 jets were in Duluth on July 14, 2014 (along with the obligatory C-17 cargo plane carrying 30 support staff and spare parts for the jets). They had an important mission to perform the next day. Six of them flew 150 miles to the Major League Baseball All-Star game in Minneapolis to do a 10 second flyover that coincided with the last strains of the Star Spangled Banner. Two spare jets were left sitting on the tarmac in Duluth. The News Tribune reporter covering that story wrote that "each of the multi-million dollar fighter jets will consume about 3,000 pounds - or 500 gallons - of fuel to make the (30 minute) round trip" to and from Minneapolis.

We're talking big bucks here, even if some of the costs are reimbursed by civilian event sponsors.

In 2012 a Duluth News-Tribune reporter covering one of the air shows wrote that the commanding officer of the Blue Angels team is required to fly a minimum of 3,000 training hours (paid for by the US taxpayer) in order to qualify for the role of commander. The other team members had to fly 1350 training hours. The journalist noted in that article that there were a total of 15 pilots in the team, although only 6 perform at a time. The team members, subs as well as prime time flyers, practice their highly technical and dangerous maneuvers virtually every day to keep their skills honed and the air shows safe.

As of 2006, there had reportedly been 230 fighter pilots since the Blue Angels started their stunt-flying for audiences. Since the Angels began flying in 1946, about 25 of their pilots have died in crashes, which means that as many as 25 multimillion-dollar planes went down in the fatal crashes (this figure does not factor in the planes that were demolished while the pilot ejected safely). In 2011, 70 Blue Angel air shows (two shows per weekend) were presented at 35 different sites, with rehearsal flights the day before each performance. When they are not touring, the Angels practice their routines year-round, usually over the Gulf of Mexico at their Pensacola base of operations.

Now for the really sobering math.

Couldn't There be a Better Use for the Fuel That is Used up in Air Shows?

Using the figures that the journalist obtained from the Blue Angels, the 3,000 hours of

training for the single Commanding Officer used up as many as 2,400,000 gallons of jet fuel just to qualify (3,000 hours X 800 gallons/hour)! Of course, this training number does not include the equally enormous amounts of fuel consumed during the air shows, the rehearsals or the flights to and from Pensacola.

The 1,350 training hours for the other pilots on the team (at one time there were as many as 15 pilots on the Blue Angels team) consumed as much as 1,080,000 gallons for each pilot's training (1,350 hours X 800 gallons/hour). Multiply that by 14 non-CO pilots and you get 15,120,000 gallons of fuel just for the hours spent training those pilots.

Considering the fact that a gallon of today's JP-5 jet fuel costs around \$8 to \$12/gallon (average \$10/gallon), every new Navy pilot who succeeds at becoming a Blue Angel pilot will cost the US taxpayer approximately \$10,080,000 per pilot (1,080,000 gallons X \$10/gallon) - just for the fuel used to become a member of the team! And the 10 million dollars is not factoring in the airmen's salaries, the retirement pensions or the tens of millions of dollars that each jet costs.

I challenge readers to try to estimate in dollar figures the enormous fuel costs for all of the Blue Angel shows/year, and then try to calculate the fuel used up in the flights to and from Pensacola (or Las Vegas in the case of the Thunderbirds). And then add in the costs of the huge transport plane that carries all the repair parts and the scores of support crew members in supply and maintenance.

Then we must consider the enormous amounts of time, mind and money that is spent producing these shows. Of course, the costs to the American taxpayer are impossible to calculate, but surely it must be billions of dollars per year, admittedly partly offset by ticket sales. Nevertheless, the burning of precious fuel must be taken into account if and when the future of fuel-wasting military air shows is re-considered.

Squandering Increasingly Scarce Fossil Fuel for our Amusement

Next weekend (August 23-24, 2014), the Blue Angels will be headlining the biennial Duluth Air Show. There will be a number of other participants, all using up increasingly scarce petroleum products for purposes of entertainment and the recruitment of starry-eyed, vulnerable young children who have been primed for wanting to join the killing professions because of their extensive experience with first person shooter videogames that make homicidal violence attractive.

America is headed for an over-population, Peak Oil, economic and climate change cliff, so isn't it about time for people to get serious about the worrisome realities above? We live in a world of rapidly dwindling fossil fuel resources that are cavalierly being squandered by our selfish corporate misleaders on Wall Street, including Big Oil, Big Agribusiness, Big Chemical, Big Food, Big Media and Big Armaments. Each of these industries - in one way or the other - profits from wars and rumors of war, and so the mesmerizing beat goes on.

And then of course we have our equally pro-war political (in both major parties) and military misleaders at both state and federal levels that have mis-led America into our current military misadventures. And none of them has a clue as to how to honorably extract the nation out of any of those quagmires.

The ill-advised decision by the Cheney/Bush administration to go to war in the oil-rich Middle

East has resulted in two disastrous, unaffordable wars, in which tens of thousands of service men and women were deceived into believing that they were fighting for America's freedom rather than for the corporate fat cats that profit from wars. Too many ex-soldiers are now physically, neurologically and/or spiritually dead or dying (way too often at their own hands), not for American "democracy", but for money-hungry corporations that cunningly waved the flag and wore the patriotic lapel pins but who really never cared about the well-being of their "cannon fodder" warriors who did their dirty work. The flag that the multinationals pledge allegiance to IS NOT the Stars and Stripes.

Millions of dead and dying American veterans from every war over the last century enlisted out of a sense of patriotic duty; but most of them soon found themselves disillusioned by the atrocities they were committing, the exposures to military toxins, the highly processed, malnourishing meals, the post-combat demons, the nightmares and the suicidality - all the while earning less than minimum wage (and usually not even getting the hazardous duty pay they deserved).

America's soldiers, airmen, seamen and Marines have been, in reality, working not for the US Constitution to which they pledged allegiance, but rather for a whole host of nefarious special interest groups that quickly stopped supporting the troops when the body bags and broken brains came home.

Hopefully, acknowledging these unwelcome realities will someday set us free from the war-mongering, get-rich quick schemers on Wall Street.

One of the purposes of this column is to point out some of the serious downsides of military air shows in order to help others make the connection between America's unaffordable imperialist, endless war agenda and the on-rushing energy and environmental crises that have been censored out of our consciousness by a feel-good media that chooses vagueness or silence when courageous clarity is what is needed.

So, next weekend, many patriotic Duluthians will be understandably watching in wide-eyed wonder at the highly skilled Blue Angel pilots as they do their breath-taking maneuvers. But some Duluthians will be pondering the many negatives of America's energy-wasting air shows. Sadly, the Blue Angels and their fans are unconsciously hastening - if nothing is done - America's inevitable moral and financial bankruptcy by wasting precious non-renewable fossil fuel resources and at the same time permanently poisoning the planet for ourselves and for those that come after us.

Dr Kohls feels a duty to warn others about issues of violence, racism, militarism and economic oppression in his weekly column. His essays are frequently republished on various websites world-wide.

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