

## All Things Dry



Dry Tortugas National Park

**Turtle Tale.** The *Dry Tortugas* may soon be under water as a result of global warming. Discovered by Spanish explorer Ponce De Leon in 1513, the small group of islands about 70 miles from Key West, Florida, got their name because they are *Dry* (no fresh water) and formerly had an abundance of *Tortugas* (Spanish for sea turtles). Fort Jefferson, pictured at left, remained solidly in Union hands throughout the Civil War.

**May the Floss Be With You.** Officials in Toronto, Canada are urging residents to dispose of dental floss as *dry waste* rather than flushing it down the toilet. Dental floss is now shred resistant and when in the waste stream, combines with nastier waste to form huge “wasteballs” which clog the pumps in the city’s sanitary pumping stations. Toronto has posted a notice on its website: “Don’t flush the

floss.” It has not yet caught on as an official city slogan.

**Snake Eyes.** When cobras spit, there’s not a *dry eye* in the house. Recent research in Germany shows that cobras accurately squirt venom at high pressure into the eyes of a victim, burning the cornea and ultimately leading to blindness. Cobras will only spit when they feel threatened, not to kill their prey. They kill like other poisonous snakes do, by biting and injecting the venom into the victim’s bloodstream.

**But It’s a Dry Cold.** One of the more environmentally friendly uses of *dry ice* is in blast cleaning (similar to sandblasting). Dry ice pellets are shot out of a jet nozzle with compressed air to clean residues such as paint, oil, mold, glue, ink and contaminants. Since the source of the dry ice is typically preexisting CO<sub>2</sub>, there is no net im-

pact on the greenhouse gas balance and no net environmental impact.

**Yaks Gone Wild.** In what might be an extreme example of *dry humor* (although the rest of the world is not laughing), the Chinese government is holding auctions for licenses to allow foreigners to hunt rare wild animals, including *endangered species*. The proceeds from the auctions will ironically be used for wildlife protection. The starting price for a permit to shoot a wild yak (pictured below) is \$40,000. There are fewer than 15,000 wild yaks remaining in the world.



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### Did you Know?

- Despite winning a lawsuit in which a local judge sued for \$67 million over a pair of lost pants, a dry cleaner in Washington, DC folded.
- In Manhattan, nearly 80,000 New Yorkers live within 20 yards of a dry cleaner.
- The EPA is investigating impacts to the Santa Clara River in California from a dry cleaner that shut down over 40 years ago.

## Dry Moments in History

**800:** Medieval Warm Period (the most recent extended episode of global warming) begins and is characterized by extreme *dryness*, especially in North America. The Medieval Warm Period lasts for 500 years and is followed by the Little Ice Age.

**1786:** Benjamin Franklin observes in a letter to his friend that “*dry gripes*” and “*dry bellyache*” (two common ailments of the time) seem to be related to lead exposure.

**1920:** America goes *dry* as Prohibition begins with the passage of the

18th Amendment. It is repealed in 1933.

**1976:** Keith Jackson of Llandegla, North Wales, begins the most boring job in the world - watching paint *dry*. The highlight of each workday is touching paint to see if it’s tacky. He is still at it.

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Canadian goose in flight

## Top 10 Unexpected Benefits of Global Warming

10. Can finally sue the makers of M&M's because M&M's will melt in your hand
9. Presidential elections will run more smoothly without Florida
8. Save money on Play-Doh because kids can play with asphalt instead
7. Canadian geese will stay in Canada (see photo at left)
6. No shirt, no shoes: you still get service
5. It will be legal in most states to shoot someone for asking "Hot enough for ya?"
4. Animals will abandon the cruel practice of wearing fur
3. Ice dancing will no longer be recognized as a legitimate sport
2. Get to see what Michael Jackson really looks like when his face melts
1. Casual Fridays: Speedos and flip flops

## The Dirt on Dry Cleaning

Dry cleaning is a cleaning process for clothing and textiles that uses an organic solvent (dry cleaning fluid) rather than water. Early dry cleaners used gasoline and kerosene which resulted in untold fires and explosions. The dry cleaning fluid most commonly used today is tetrachloroethylene (also known as perchloro-



ethylene, perc or PCE). It is also commonly used in such products as typewriter correction fluid and shoe polish. PCE has greater cleaning power and is less flammable than those earlier chemicals, although it is a carcinogen and can cause health problems even at low levels. According to California's South Coast Air Quality Management District, people who live near dry cleaners have a higher risk of cancer than those who live near oil refineries or power plants.

The EPA recently filed an environmental damage lawsuit against Dean and Colleen Soulliere, former owners of a dry cleaner in Columbus, Ohio, to recover the cleanup costs of groundwater contamination under the Superfund law. As part of the settlement reached, the cou-

ple agreed to pay \$100,000 to avoid the risks and costs associated with litigation.

PCE is twice as heavy as water and has the ability to penetrate porous materials (like a concrete floor), migrate through all soil types and sink to the bottom of the water table, where it is extremely difficult to clean up and can persist for decades. It is estimated that 70% of all PCE used in the US ends up in the environment, contaminating groundwater and surface water. California passed a ban on PCE in January 2007, beginning a 15-year phase out period. By 2023, dry cleaners in the state will not be allowed to use PCE. Eco-friendly and effective alternatives to PCE are currently available and include cleaning processes utilizing carbon dioxide and silicon.