

SEVERE WEATHER

West Coast Hit Again

MORE POUNDING FROM WIND, RAIN PREDICTED THIS WEEKEND

By Margie Manson
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The second strong storm in a week pounded the West Coast with heavy rain and fierce wind, drenching much of Northern California, knocking out power in parts of Washington and forcing closure of a major highway north of Los Angeles.

In the northern Sierra Nevada, forest service officials worried Friday of possible avalanches as up to 2 feet of snow was expected to pile onto peaks already burdened with several feet of snow in the past several days.

In the San Francisco Bay area, persistent rain Thursday flooded streets, knocked out power to thousands of residents and kicked up surf. Further north, the storm caused rivers and creeks to rise, and left parts of the Napa Valley wine region with a dusting of snow.

Damage was not confined to the West Coast, however.



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Chart House restaurant employee Juan Pablo Garcia runs from a wave crashing onto the patio of the restaurant Friday morning during the high tide in Cardiff-by-the-Sea, Calif.

Cleanup crews in Newton, Miss., on Friday cleared away twisted debris, mangled power lines and other remnants of a tornado that plowed through this eastern Mississippi town Thursday, injuring

more than 50 people. Eight homes and five businesses were destroyed, and scores were damaged, according to a preliminary damage assessment.

In Washington state, crews

were working early Friday to restore power to about 1,000 homes in King County after winds knocked down trees, felled power lines and blocked roads. At the peak of the high winds Thursday, 13,000 Puget Sound Energy customers lost power.

In southwestern Oregon, high winds Thursday caused blizzard-like conditions on the Siskiyou Summit, forcing officials to close part of Interstate 5 for four hours. More than 2,100 people lost power, but had it restored within several hours.

Despite the problems, forecasters said the latest storm and another pair expected this weekend are much weaker than a storm that pounded the state earlier this week.

"We have definitely already seen the worst of it," National Weather Service forecaster Will Pi said. "I think Saturday we'll still have some showers around, but by Sunday we should be drying out."

Transplantation Choices Grow

MAJOR OBSTACLE PREVENTING PIG PARTS BEING USED IN HUMANS DISAPPEARING

By Anita Srikameswaran
PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

Partly because of sheer luck, researchers at the University of Pittsburgh and scientists from a private company have overcome a critical barrier to using pigs as a possible source of organs for transplantation into humans.

Pigs genetically engineered by the team were used as a source of tissue that was successfully transplanted into a mouse without inciting immediate, devastating rejection.

The feat makes plausible the idea that pig organs might someday be transplanted into humans, ultimately reducing the demand for scarce human donor organs.

The findings were published Thursday at www.scienceexpress.org, an online, early version of the journal Science.

The use of pig organs for transplant has not been feasible until now because the human immune system mounts a rapid, unstoppable antibody response, called hyperacute rejection, that destroys the animal cells within hours.

That's because the surfaces of non-human animal cells carry sugar molecules called galactose, which is foreign to humans. Standard anti-rejection drugs are ineffective against the antibodies that attack the sugars.

But hyperacute rejection might be prevented if scientists could breed pigs that didn't have an en-

zyme necessary to make the sugar. To do that, they used genetic engineering methods to "knock out" the two copies of the gene that makes the galactose enzyme.

Scientists at the Virginia branch of Scotland-based PPL Therapeutics inserted that lab-modified genetic material into a developing pig embryo, using the same techniques that created Dolly, the cloned sheep. There was a chance that the pigs could not survive without the galactose enzyme.

In July, a litter of four piglets that had cell surfaces bare of galactose were born. But curiously, when scientists looked more closely at the litter's genes, they found that the piglets carried one seemingly normal copy of the galactose gene, which should have been sufficient to make enough of the sugar to trigger hyperacute rejection.

Extensive study in his lab revealed that the galactose gene actually contained a mutation that led to the production of a non-functional enzyme. The chances of that occurring are about one in a trillion.

Study author and PPL's vice president of research David Ayares said that if not for a special technique used to select for galactose-negative cells, the scientists may not have even realized what they had.

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AIDS Growing In Thailand

DISEASE THREATENS GENERAL COMMUNITY

By Andrew Perrin
SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

BANGKOK, Thailand — For years, Thailand's AIDS prevention program was acclaimed as a model for Asia, a beacon of light in a region that had no tradition of tackling a major health crisis head-on.

Through a highly successful public-education campaign and promotion of condom use, the government stemmed the rapid spread of HIV by targeting red-light districts. The nation's well-funded programs reduced annual new HIV infections from 143,000 in 1991 to 29,000 in 2001, according to UNAIDS, the United Nations' HIV-AIDS program. The World Bank credited the program with saving 395,000 people and billions of dollars in medical treatment and lost working hours.

But even that wasn't enough. Today, AIDS is the leading cause of death in Thailand, overtaking traffic accidents, heart disease and cancer.

"The disease has moved out of the red-light districts and into the general community," said Usanee Jangneon, health coordinator at the Human Development Foundation in Bangkok. "It is all over Thailand now. It's in the lower class, the middle class and the upper class. It's in the womb. It's everywhere."

Critics contend that early success bred government complacency. They argue that drastic cuts in AIDS programs in the past six years because of the nation's economic crisis, coupled with a reluctance to confront the changing face of AIDS, has sparked the virus' resurgence.

"The Thai program was very successful with sex workers and their clients," said Tim Brown, director of the UNAIDS program at the East-West Center in Hawaii. "But now there are other issues that have to be addressed — IDUs (intravenous drug users) and husband-to-wife transmissions."

More than 1 million people, or 1 in 60 Thais, already are infected with the virus, giving Thailand the 15th largest population of HIV-infected people in the world. By 2006, more than 50,000 are expected to die annually in Thailand from AIDS-related causes, according to a World Bank study.

U.N. researchers say about 80 percent of AIDS cases involve heterosexual sexual transmission.

In a comprehensive report released in 2000, the World Bank warned that Thailand risked a resurgence of the AIDS epidemic because of a decline in condom use at home and in extramarital liaisons.

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One-Man's Mercy Campaign Leads To Protecting Jaywalking Turtles

By Julie Hauserman
ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Matt Aresco has become a major advocate in helping turtles get across U.S. 27 safely. He took up this cause after seeing a smashed turtle on the highway.

"When I got out and walked, I picked up 90 dead turtles in just a third of a mile," he said. He piled them on a tarp and took a grisly picture.

Ten species of turtles have been dying on this road for many, many years. This 39-year-old Florida State graduate student in herpetology is the first person who ever tried to do something about it.

Through back-breaking research on the side of the road, he has documented the highest rate of turtle mortality on any road in

North America. Aresco found that 98 percent of the turtles that try to cross this stretch of U.S. 27 don't make it. There is one culvert, but that is not enough. He has seen the turtles hesitate, but the strong drive to reach the water on the other side of the highway makes them try to cross.

Aresco started a Web site (www.lakejacksonturtles.org) and put his roadkill pictures on it. Turtle enthusiasts from all over the world sent him letters and e-mails.

Aresco says the turtle population can't adapt to such huge losses. Female turtles take as long as a decade to get to the point where they can reproduce. And most of their eggs are snatched by animals. So, when turtles keep getting smashed on the road, it affects the balance of the entire population.

Aresco has started a massive campaign to get an official "eco-

passage" under the road — a series of culverts big enough so that turtles can see light at the other end. They instinctively move toward the light. One ecopassage at Paynes Prairie, in Gainesville, has been a huge success, dropping roadkill to a dribble, according to David O'Neill, a biologist who spearheaded the effort to install the \$3.8-million ecopassage that lets creatures cross a road safely.

Now the DOT is funding a \$50,000 study of the problem. And there is money set aside each year in both the federal and state budgets to solve environmental problems caused by highways. A citizens group has formed to lobby for the ecopassage.

Aresco's obsession has proved contagious.

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Canada Eyes Online Marijuana Delivery

By Ingrid Peritz
TORONTO GLOBE AND MAIL

Pot in Canada may soon be a click away with the launch of a home-delivery service for medical marijuana over the Internet.

Marijuana activists in Montreal announced the start-up of www.marijuanahomedelivery.ca shortly after a Quebec judge threw out possession and trafficking charges Thursday against two volunteers at a medical marijuana club.

Quebec Court Judge Gilles Cadieux said authorizing those who are ill to use marijuana in Canada while depriving them of a legal source violates the right to life and liberty.

Judge Cadieux stopped short of invalidating Canada's pot laws, saying such a decision is up to higher courts. But he ordered a

stay of proceedings against Alexandre Neron and Marc-Boris St-Maurice, who faced charges of possession and trafficking after Montreal police raided their Compassion Club in 2000 and seized marijuana.

St-Maurice immediately declared a moral victory and convened a news conference to announce the launch of a new marijuana-by-mail service for the ill in Canada, opening a new frontier in the challenge to the country's pot laws.

"We want to serve every person in Canada who needs it," St-Maurice, head of the Marijuana Party of Canada, said in an interview. "Marijuana is an effective medicine that works wonders, and there are a lot of people who could benefit from it and are not getting it."


The price of the high-grade

therapeutic pot would be competitive with street prices, he said: \$30 for two grams or \$120 for 10 grams. To register, customers have to fill out a form and obtain a doctor's letter diagnosing them with any one of the more than 200 ailments listed on the group's Web site.

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