January 1995

Uplink

A newsletter for the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting

Uplink update

We start the new year with articles that show the ways in which computer-assisted reporting can be used on different beats and subjects.

Mike Wendland, a TV reporter, recounts the intense and widespread interest that stories on poorly-maintained restaurants can create. (After all, everyone eats.) Seth Hamblin interviews some of the better environmental reporters on how to use electronic information. David Armstrong, a long-time Boston reporter, talks about the treasure trove of stories that a parking ticket databases offers.

In addition, George Landau, a guru of cleaning dirty data, volunteers yet another clever way of standardizing the bothersome ways in which names appear in databases.

In next month's issue, we plan to offer more variety by doing an overview of some of the best CAR stories that we saw in 1994.

Inside

Detroit inspection data provides bite

Restaurants on CAR menu

By Mike Wendland
WDIV-TV, Detroit

Viewer response and e-mail are still coming in, weeks after our CAR (computer-assisted reporting) project on metropolitan Detroit's dirtiest restaurants hit the air last fall.

From start to finish, the project took about two months, with all but a week or so taken up by data acquisition and analysis. Fleshing out the people part of the stories — finding the food poisoning victims and confronting the restaurant owners — was the easy part.

Restaurant inspections are handled by county health departments. In our case, we had three separate counties regulating restaurant sanitation and two municipalities operating their own health departments. That meant we had five agencies to deal with, none of which kept the data we needed in electronic form.

What made the project feasible for us, however, was the standard inspection form each health department sanitarian filled out during the inspection.

The form called for a rating to be given to each establishment. The rating was determined by subtracting standardized points for each violation from a perfect score of 100. Anything less than 70 was considered unsanitary.

So we knew we had a measuring stick — something that could compare a restaurant in one jurisdiction to a restaurant in another. The problem was that there were too many "others." More than 10,000 restaurants are in business in metropolitan Detroit. We wanted to find the worst.

Our approach was to review the most recent inspection reports for each restaurant. We designed our own FoxPro table and took laptops into the offices to enter the data on each eating place that scored 70 or below. While gathering the raw data we went online and sent a query out on Profnet looking for experts in the field of restaurant sanitation. From that research, we learned that a single low score can sometimes be attributed to the inspector simply arriving at the wrong time on the wrong day.

The only way to be fair, the experts said, was to look for patterns — consistently low scores over a period of time. We decided to revise the table and include the last three inspections, which covered an 18-month period.

Back at the office, we later averaged and sorted our list of "dirty" restaurants. From just over 10,000 restaurants, our list of problem, or unsanitary establishments totaled 224.

There were plenty of surprises. Top gourmet restaurants, trendy yuppie eateries in the suburbs and a popular downtown Cajun restaurant all made the list of dirty restaurants. So did

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Coming Events

March 12-17, 1995
NICAR Seminar
Columbia, Missouri

May 14-19, 1995
NICAR Seminar
Columbia, Missouri

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NICAR is supported by a grant from The Freedom Forum intended to help the institute deliver its services nationwide to news organizations and associations.

Lessons from parking database never expire

Repaying tickets in Boston

By David Armstrong
The Boston Globe

Parking in Boston is often compared to a trip to the dentist: It can be painful and expensive. The city of Boston, not unlike scores of other cities across the country, dispatches meter maids to aggressively prowl the clogged city streets and hand out thousands of parking tickets each day.

Since everybody hates parking tickets, the *Boston Herald* (where I used to work) decided a year ago to request a copy of the city's parking ticket database. We had a number of stories in mind when requesting the database. We wanted to know what areas of the city were ticketed most frequently, which areas were avoided by ticket writers and why, who were the scofflaws and who was having their tickets dismissed or taken care of.

The database of 3.5 million records on 26 9-track tapes proved helpful for those ideas and more.

In fact, the most surprising information on the database was something we had never considered. The city had collected more than $2 million in *overpayments* from unwitting parking violators. This information proved to be wildly popular with the motoring public.

The newspaper published a list of those companies and individuals owed the most money by the city because of overpayments. The overpayments were the result of errors by the city in recording license plate numbers, overlapping overdue notices and poor bookkeeping by parking violators who paid for the same ticket twice.

Embarrassed parking officials were forced to admit they knew about the overpayments for years, but did nothing to return the money. The same officials set up a hotline to refund the money after the story appeared.

The mayor ordered that printouts of the 60,000 companies and individuals owed money for overpayments be placed in every city library for public inspection. Two months after the first story was published, the city had returned $1 million to parking violators.

The database provided by the city of Boston actually came from a city vendor - Lockheed Information Services. Lockheed maintains the same records for many large and midsize cities

Restaurants: Continued from page one

plenty of Coney islands, Chinese restaurants and some of the well-known chains.

As we entered the data at the health department, we created a memo field in the FoxPro table, using it to record food-borne illness reports, customer complaints and notable problems like cockroaches floating in water glasses, bugs in food, sewerage backed up on the kitchen floor and other disgusting things you'll be glad we didn't mention if you're reading this at lunch time. That led us to the people stories that fleshed out the statistics.

Our I-team series aired on the 11 p.m. news. We won the time period all four nights. The series was the talk of the town for weeks on the morning drive-time radio shows and the newspaper on-the-town columns.

We invited viewers to write in for a list. We received some 8,000 letters. We also made the lists available by e-mail and electronically sent out another 1,000.

And then there was this postscript: The Detroit area restaurant with the absolutely lowest score — a 40 — was owned by the suburban chef who we did a weekly "gourmet-on-the go" report on our noon news. I ended up interviewing him about his problems after he stepped off the set. "Go" he did. He is no longer working for the station.

Note: For additional information on covering restaurants and health department data see "Dining on eatery data" by Dan Browning in the March 1994 issue of Uplink.

Mike Wendland is the head of the I-Team for WDIV-TV in Detroit. He attended the August 1994 NICAR "boot camp" for computer-assisted reporting. He can be reached by e-mail at mikew@wdiv.com.

across the country.

The database has fields indicating the location of the ticket, who wrote it, the amount, the amount of overdue charges, whether or not the ticket was dismissed, the registration number of the ticketed vehicle and more.

The size of the file - 1.7 gigabytes - presented some problems. The data was analyzed on a Gateway 486 PC with an 800 megabyte hard drive. Using Nine-track Express, I heavily filtered the data to bring in only the information I absolutely needed.

Using FoxPro, I would look at 300 to 400 megabyte chunks. For instance, when looking at who had tickets dismissed, I brought in only the fields for dismissal, name, amount, location and date. This cut the record length more than 70 percent. The hardest part of this endeavor, it turned out, was getting the tapes in the first place (see sidebar).

Spending three weeks analyzing and playing with the data also drove home another point: Reporters should always do their own computer work, even if it is with the assistance of a more experienced or skilled programmer. Several story ideas were born from the long and often painful task of learning the database and attempting to analyze it.

In addition to the discovery that tens of thousands of motorists were overpaying the city for tickets, here are some of the other stories that resulted from analyzing the database:

— The police officer assigned to drive former Mayor Raymond Flynn had every parking ticket issued to his personal car, a 1987 Jaguar, dismissed. The tickets totalled $355.

— Widely hated meter maids, who endure the curses and shouts of angry ticket recipients, are major money makers for the city. We found one meter maid had written 15,210 tickets totalling $516,000 in just one year of work. The same meter maid was paid $433 a week for her work.

— We were able to produce a chart showing readers the 40 locations in Boston that would most likely result in your car getting a ticket.

— Rental car companies were the biggest scofflaws in the city. Two companies owed the city a combined $1 million for parking tickets amassed by rental drivers who never paid up.

(David Armstrong moved from The Herald to The Globe in 1994. He can be reached at 617-929-2539 or through e-mail at armstr@news.globe. com.)

A Lesson on obtaining data

It took three years for the Boston Herald to obtain a copy of the city's parking ticket database on 9-track tapes.

The city only complied with the request when it was threatened with legal action by the state attorney general, who is charged with enforcing the state's public records law.

In repeatedly rejecting the *Herald's* request, the city maintained it had the right to decide the form of any response to a public records request. In that vein, the city offered to provide the parking records in paper form at great cost to the newspaper. The state's public records law, which is modeled after the federal FOIA, does not provide government agencies the option of responding this way.

Until recently, the city of Boston uniformly refused to comply with any requests for records in electronic form. In most of these cases, the city would offer a mile-long printout of paper as an alternative. In fact, city workers once delivered boxes of documents to the Herald newsroom after a reporter specifically requested the information on 9-track tape.

It should be noted that the city's top computer manager also served as the mayor's pollster. That combination of computer knowledge and political savvy may explain the city's reluctance to help the media and others gain access to computerized records.

— David Armstrong

Parking tickets offer wealth of stories

Whether you're a CAR novice or an old pro, city parking ticket records offer a wealth of story opportunities.

Ron Brown of the *Roanoke Times & World-News* investigated his city's "Car Wars" in a series published earlier this year. (Call the IRE/NICAR resource center, 314-882-2042 for a copy.) With the help of computerized municipal records, Brown found how much Roanoke is earning from parking tickets, how many it dismisses, and the top 10 blocks for parking violations. Other statistics included the top grossing police officers and a list of the most common types of violations.

Meanwhile, police officers and local business owners contributed anecdotes and color with their tales of furious motorists and creative scofflaws.

But even better, Brown also found a few surprises on his list of frequent offenders.

At the top of the list was Roanoke's Chief Assistant Commonwealth Attorney Betty Jo Anthony — someone, Brown wrote, who makes a living enforcing the rules.

And before she could be identified, *Times & World-News* columnist Kathleen Wilson stepped forward with her own admission of excessive fines.

— Gwen Carleton
Nicar staff

Successes with EPA databases

By Seth Hamblin
NICAR Staff

With government data available on everything from endangered birds to the quality of the air through which they fly, there's no limit to the enterprise stories an environmental reporter can craft. Some reporters say that because of the amount, variety and accessibility of these databases, the environment is better suited for computer-assisted reporting than any other beat. Their consistent success in using environmental databases shows they're probably right.

Toxic waste spills

Dave Davis asked to cover the environment when he joined the *Plain Dealer* in 1990 because he knew the beat would give him plenty of chances to do CAR stories. One of his first CAR stories for the Plain Dealer, "Spills Chill Regulators," took about two weeks. Using XDB database manager software, Davis analyzed the 1991 Ohio emergency response database, which comprises 5,589 records on chemical spills. (NICAR has the U.S. emergency response database, ERNS, in its library.)

"This was a perfect database for us because Ohio has a lot of chemical emergencies. A lot of plants blow up," Davis said.

The database combines numerical fields with variable-length text fields. This mix helped Davis to flesh out statistics with colorful narratives.

For instance, one record explained how a railroad switchman lost communication with an engineer when batteries failed in their two-way radios just as the train was switching tracks. The engineer backed the car into a storage tank, which spilled 800 gallons of a toxic chemical. The chemical ended up being flushed into the city's sewers.

Davis discovered that 121 of the chemical spills in Ohio had been severe enough to threaten lives and property. Rarely did the companies report the spills to the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, as is required by law. Instead, mostly police or fire officials called in the accidents. Sometimes residents blew the whistle.

Endangered species

Fresno (Calif.) *Bee* reporter Russell Clemings recommended that when reporters "cast their net" for environmental stories, they should cast it wide enough to include computer data. When Clemings was researching "Struggle to Survive," a series on endangered species in California, he heard the 1987 amendment to the Endangered Species Act required the federal Fish and Wildlife Service to compile a list of how much money was being spent to preserve each endangered species. He asked for a copy of the report.

"I realized that what I was looking at was a computer printout," Clemings said. "So I asked, 'Can you send me the disk, too?'"

Using a 286 computer and a DOS version of Paradox, Clemings grouped federal and state spending on each class of endangered species. He found that most funding went to birds or mammals that are attractive and well-known, such as bald eagles and gray wolves. Preservation efforts discriminated against bugs, crustaceans and snails. Officials were particularly short-shrifting plants. They spent an average of 66 times more per species on birds than plants — an average of $604,260 and $9,050, respectively. Spiders had it the worst of all. Officials spent an average of $500 per endangered spider species.

Clemings said this data base could be adapted for any state or region. Reporters could find out from their states' wildlife departments which

EPA sources

Federal EPA databases can provide environmental reporters with countless enterprise stories. However, reporters who have used these databases say state and local databases often are easier to get and have more recent data than their federal counterparts.

Here are some of the EPA databases environmental reporters have found useful. They can be acquired with a Freedom of Information Act request. If the cost is too high, call NICAR, 314-882-0684, and we might be able to offer it at a lesser price.

Emergency Response Notification System

ERNS contains notifications of oil and hazardous chemical spills. Fields in the database include name of discharger; date of release; material released; cause of release; amount released; source of release; damages, injuries or deaths; and incident location.

Sponsoring department: Emergency Response Division
Contact: Dana Stalcup
Telephone: (703) 603-8735
Information line: (202) 260-2342

Permit Compliance System

PCS contains information on more than 65,000 industrial facilities that hold National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permits, which allow the facilities to discharge wastewater. Fields include facility name, permit limit, violation and enforcement actions.

Sponsoring deparment: Office of Water
Contact: Mike Mundell
Telephone: (202) 564-5031
Information line: (703) 908-2680

Aerometric Information Retrieval System

AIRS contains records on emissions and compliance data for industrial plants as well as ambient air quality data for geographical areas.

Sponsoring department: Office of Air and Radiation
Contact: Andrea Kelsey
Telephone: (919) 541-5549

"Access EPA," the source of this list, can be found at the gopher site: gopher.epa.gov. "EPA Information Locators," "Access EPA."

species on the list inhabit their areas. The reporters then could focus on the species within the reporters' states or regions.

Water pollution

Before joining the *Plain Dealer*, Davis was a reporter at the Dayton (Ohio) Daily News, whose readers live near the banks of the Great Miami River and its tributaries. Davis acquired a U.S. EPA database on water pollution discharge permits to find out how much sludge was being pumped into the waterways.

Not only was it a whole lot of sludge, it was a whole lot more sludge than the factories could legally dump under their National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permits.

The records, compiled in the Permit Compliance System database, showed that state environmental regulators knew of the facilities' chronic violations but did little to to punish the businesses. Some of the violators were dumping up to several thousand times the amounts that their permits allowed. Many companies racked up hundreds of violations without penalty.

To see if the computer data were reflected in the quality of the river's water, Davis canoed 110 miles of the Great Ohio. What he saw and smelled confirmed what the numbers were telling him.

"We were going by one factory, and this shocking pink water was coming out of the pipes, turning the river pink," he said. The wastewater from the factory near Hamilton, Ohio, altered the color of the river for a mile. Further downriver near Franklin, Ohio, a mix of black incinerator ash and detergent ran down a trough into the water to turn it into a sickly green.

Databases in dailies

Scott Thurm, a reporter for the *San Jose* (Calif.) *Mercury News*, says environmental databases can be as handy for dailies as they are for enterprise stories. During the early morning on July 25, 1993, General Chemical Corp. in nearby Richmond, Calif., developed a leak in a tank containing sulfur dioxide. More than 2,000 people sought treatment at hospitals for stinging eyes and sore throats.

Thurm called the California EPA to get data on the types of toxics General Chemical produced. By 11 a.m., Thurm had the entire Toxic Release Inventory profile of the company to provide background for the story.

To prepare for chemical accidents such as this one, Adam Berliant, a database editor for the *Tacoma* (Wash.) *News Tribune*, set up the Toxic Release Inventory on a computer in the newsroom. Any reporter can type in the name of a company and come up with the kinds of chemicals it releases and the manufacturing process in which it is involved. Unfortunately most reporters at the *News Tribune* fail to see its potential, and the database setup, while easy to operate, is rarely used, Berliant said.

Thurm suggested looking for state databases rather than federal ones whenever possible. TRI and ERNS, for instance, are first compiled by states and then sent to the U.S. EPA. Therefore, state databases are usually more up-to-date than their federal counterparts.

Another good reason to look on the state level, Clemings said, is that there are lots of obscure but useful state environmental databases waiting for reporters to discover them. His rule of thumb: If you get a document that looks like a computer table, ask for it on disk.

How to deal with EPA data

With just an old XT, shareware and a free database, you can create great environmental stories for your readership area.

The EPA now gives out state Toxic Release Inventory databases as if they were candy. To get a state's TRI database mailed to you, call TRI user support at (202) 260-1531. You will receive it within a couple of weeks.

The data comes on 5 1/2-inch disks, so if you don't have this type of drive, swap the data onto 3 1/2-inch disks on another computer.

Data jockeys at the EPA set up state TRI for easy import into almost any database program. If you don't already have a database program, you can to get a shareware database, such as PC-File, from a computer-users group, BBS or university computing service.

Once the data is imported, separate the records by zip code and add the amount of chemicals released by all the companies within each zip code. This will show you which areas in your county or region have reported the most industrial pollution. You can then look at the companies which fall within the zip code areas with the highest amount of pollution to see which companies are emitting the most and worst pollutants.

Present this information in a data map or create a list ranking the most polluted areas and the biggest polluters works.

By calculating totals for the releases to air, water, on-site landfill, underground well injection and off-site hauling fields, you can show, in percentages, how industries in your area are disposing their waste.

Each facility will have a field for its standard industrial code, which tells what sort of manufacturing they do, from making clothes to smelting metals. By totaling the amount of releases for each standard industrial code, you can rank the types of industries that pollute the most.

Your reporting doesn't end with the data analysis. With the address of each facility included in the database, it easy to find the residents nearest the factories. The companies also file the name and telephone number of a contact person with whom you can confirm the data and ask whether attempts at pollution reduction are being made.

(Some of the concepts for this sidebar were derived from Dave Davis' story "Industries Report Decreases," The Plain Dealer, December 11, 1991.)

Editing data for consistency

By George Landau
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

A lot of data analysis involves grouping and sorting-summing the expense reimbursements to a bunch of employees when you have the employees' names and addresses but not Social Security numbers, for example. Unless you're sure that Joseph Schmo's name is entered the same way for each reimbursement, and that his address is consistently spelled, you won't be able to get reliable totals.

One dependable but very painful way to edit this stuff is to list the various values in a field — names, for example — and manually do search-and-replace on the database until everything's consistent. In FoxPro or another SQL database, you could start like this:

```
select fullname, count(*) ;
from expenses ;
group by 1 ;
order by 1
```

The query would return an alphabetized list of every way that a name is spelled in the entire database, along with the number of times each variation occurs. For example:

FULLNAME	CNT
Landau, George	7
Landau, George T	3
Landau, George T.	2
Landau, George Thomas	2

Let's say you're certain these are all the same George Landau (remember, we can check addresses, also). You want to standardize on the variation with the most info: "George Thomas Landau." To edit these the hard way, you could start typing commands like this:

```
replace all fullname with "Landau, George Thomas" for fullname = "Landau, George"
replace all fullname with "Landau, George Thomas" for fullname = "Landau, George T"
replace all fullname with "Landau, George Thomas" for fullname = "Landau, George T."
```

Fine, but there are 10,000 records in this database. You might not be done for another month. The absolute fastest way out of this mess involves some moderately complex FoxPro programming; if you really want to know, give me a call and I'll tell you how to do it. But without any fancy programming — with only two keyboard macros, really — you can get the job done with a minimum of pain.

Without any fancy programming — with only two keyboard macros, really — you can get the job done with a minimum of pain.

Here's how:

1. For reasons that will become clear as you read on, we need to get a list of every unique name into a FoxPro program file (*.prg), which is just a text file that contains a list of commands that will be executed in bulk, as if you had typed them all at once in FoxPro's command box. A query like this will do the job:

```
select fullname ;
from expenses ;
group by 1 ;
order by 1 ; [this line isn't actually necessary, since the 'group by' sorts alpha-ascending by default]
to file CLEAN1.PRG nowait
```

The last line of this query puts the results into the specified text file, as ordinary ASCII text. The 'nowait' clause prevents the process from halting at every screenful and forcing you to press a key to continue.

2. Now let's edit the "program" you just created by typing in the Command box: *modify command clean1*

3. Delete the first few lines, down to and including the line that contains the field name heading. You'll also notice that each line starts with two spaces of padding, and ends with a lot of padding. We want to get rid of those extra spaces, which we can do by using the Find function off the Edit menu.

First, get rid of all the leading spaces by searching for \r\n__ (these blanks represent two spaces) and replacing with \r\n (\r\n is how you specify CarriageReturn-LineFeed in FoxPro's Find dialog box). Then get rid of the trailing spaces by replacing _____\r\n with \r\n a few times; each time you get no matches, specify fewer trailing spaces until all are gone.

This search-and-replace step can be tricky, so don't panic if you don't get it right the first time. Call me if you get stuck.

4. Now we've got a list of every name variation in the database, free of unwanted spaces. Our goal is to record two keyboard macros that will generate a REPLACE command for the names we want to change. Let's say you're looking at these entries again:

```
Landau, George
Landau, George T
Landau, George T.
Landau, George Thomas
```

If you wanted to make the last one (Landau,

George Thomas) the standard entry, click the cursor anywhere on that line. Here's where we'll record our first macro. First press shift-F10 to start the macro recorder. Specify a keystroke to assign the macro (I like Ctrl-Z, 'cause I don't use it for anything else). Then click OK. Every key you press from now until you press shift-F10 again will be recorded — mouse movements and clicks will be ignored. Press these keys (things in curly braces represent special keys; don't actually type the braces or the word, just press the key or key-combo): {Home}{Shift+End}{Ctrl+C}

Now click shift-F10 again and click OK to stop recording the macro. Now whenever you press Ctrl-Z (or whatever keystroke you specified for the macro), FoxPro will define whatever line the cursor's on and copy all of it to the clipboard.

Now click the cursor on the first line you want to change, "Landau, George." Here's where we'll record our second macro. First press shift-F10 to start the macro recorder. Specify a keystroke to assign the macro (try something physically close to Ctrl-Z or whatever you chose, like Ctrl-A). Then click OK. Once again, every key you press from now until you press shift-F10 again will be recorded — mouse movements and clicks will be ignored. Type these keys and characters (again, things in curly braces are special keys; don't actually type the braces or the word, just press the key or key-combo):

{Home}replace all fullname with "{Ctrl+V}" for fullname = "{End}"

Then press Shift-F10 again and click OK to stop recording the macro. Now whenever you press Ctrl-A (or whatever keystroke you specified for the second macro), FoxPro will create a command to replace that line's contents with whatever's in the clipboard.

5. Before you get down to business, you should save the macros so that you won't have to re-record them next time you run FoxPro. Pull down the Program menu and choose Macros. You can either save these as part of the default macros, which are loaded whenever FoxPro is run, or under a new name that you can restore manually when you need to.

6. Now for the truly thrilling part. To begin standardizing all those spellings, just position the cursor on an entry that you want to become the standard and click Ctrl-Z (the first macro you recorded). This copies the line to the clipboard. Then click on one of the lines you want changed to the standard, and click Ctrl-A (or the key for the second macro) to create a "replace" command. Do this until you've made it all the way through the file. Then go through and delete any entries that weren't made into a "replace..." command. (Hint: if you're comfortable going back and forth between text files and tables, as I described in the earlier part of this handout dealing with print images, you can append this program into a table and delete all the records that don't start with "replace", then copy it back to a text file).

7. Before you go any further, make a backup copy of the table you're intending to edit.

8. Then open up either the backup or the original and do the program you just created. If you called the file "clean1.prg," you just need to type "do clean1" in the Command box. This program may take a while to run if the database is large, because each "replace" command forces FoxPro to scan through all of the data. At least you're free to do something else, though.

9. When it's done, your data will be standardized. You can now do accurate grouping, summing and sorting.

Database library keeps growing

NICAR keeps adding to its database library. A partial list includes:

- Federal Aviation Administration service difficulty reports that show the history of problems that a plane had before it crashed.
- FBI crime data that allows you to do detailed analysis of crime in your community and state.
- Social security death records that you can use for stories that go beyond simple listing. The database also permits reporters to circumvent states that have closed their death records.
- Federal procurement contracts. This database can help you discover the impact of cuts in defense spending, or the amount of housing and office space federal agencies rent in your city, or the amount of toilet paper the feds purchased in your community, or the biggest federal contractors in your state.
- Home Mortgage Disclosure Act records that you use to look at disparities in minority lending.
- OSHA inspection safety records that show the most frequently cited employer in your state and what the work safety violations have been.
- Federal gun dealer records that show who is dealing in weapons or that a local police officer moonlights as a provider of guns to criminals.

To request data, call NICAR at 314-882-0684 or E-Mail us at nicar@muccmail.missouri.edu

Bits, Bytes and Barks

Online environmental info in Canada

Environment Canada's Green Lane (http://www.ns.doe.ca/how.html) provides a wide variety of regional and national environmental information, including:

— the latest regional weather forecasts, satellite photos, maps & radar images

— the complete texts of many of its most popular national publications;

— details about many regional and national initiatives and programs;

— answers to some of the questions that Atlantic Canadians most frequently ask when they phone or write to the Department;

— direct phone numbers of the Department's regional experts on numerous issues and initiatives;

— details and documents regarding regional public consultation meetings;

— news about regional public environmental events;

— descriptions of the department's funding programs, including a guide on how to prepare funding proposals;

— a list of the department's key publications available to order;

— copies of its recent regional press releases and announcements;

— the complete text of its environmental legislation, regulations, guidelines, codes of good practice, and related policies;

— details about its key regional federal/provincial agreements; and

— descriptions of its mission, roles, responsibilities and organizational structure.

Overview of 1994 CAR stories

Uplink will do an overview of 1994's CAR stories in the February issue, but here's a sample of articles we've recently received:

— A three-part series on suicide by (Tacoma, WA) *News Tribune*, using Washington state death records.

— A three-part series on elevator safety in Massachusetts by *The Boston Globe*, using elevator inspection records.

— An investigation by *New York Newsday* into parking tickets that found the city owed $18 million to more than 600,000 motorists, using a parking ticket database. (See parking ticket story on page two.)

— An eight-part series on crime and punishment by *The Miami Herald*, using FBI Uniform Crime Report data, criminal justice databases, and 87 reports from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

— A four-part series, "Starving the Wife," by *The Charlotte Observer* on how divorcing spouses take advantage of flawed state laws and poorly monitored courts. The Observer used court records to document long delays in cases.

— An investigation by the *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland, OH, into thousands of unnecessary C-sections, using Ohio birth records.

Copies of these articles can be obtained through NICAR by calling 314-882-2042.

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