


“Dark Waters”: a movie to think by

The Bethlehem Gadfly Environment, Environmental Advisory Council, Serious Issues December 5, 2019

 *The latest in a series of posts relating to the environment, Bethlehem's Climate*

Action Plan, and Bethlehem's Environmental Advisory Council 

Many Gadfly followers are environmentally focused.

The movie “Dark Waters” opens nationally tomorrow and will no doubt play soon locally. Unfortunately, though it is listed on the web site of my go-to place the Banko Ale House Cinema as “coming soon,” they tell me today it will not be playing there. But look for it elsewhere.

Below are selections from a review of “Dark Waters” published in the *Call Tuesday*.

Looks good. Looks meaningful.

Gadfly loves these kinds of films. “[Reel American History](#)” was his long-standing project with Lehigh students as part of his larger [History on Trial](#) suite of web projects. And RAH contained several projects on films similar in nature with “Dark Waters”: [Blowing the whistle on “Big Tobacco” \[The Insider \(1999\)\]](#); [Radiation kills Karen Silkwood \[Silkwood \(1983\)\]](#).

Gadfly has several times recommended [the Radical Moderate blog](#) of sustainability warrior and Bethlehem native Alison Steele.

Alison has just published [the third in a series](#) of posts framing “Dark Waters” with the documentary — available online here — “[The Devil We Know](#).”

The first 5 minutes of the documentary will scare the hell out of you.

Gadfly recommends that you view the documentary in concert with Alison's posts and then see the movie.

This is "Reel American History"!

And Gadfly would very much invite posts reacting to the film, the documentary, Alison's framing of them — all of the above.

Serious business.

(What do we know of the environmental impact of Bethlehem Steel? Studies?)

[David Michaels, "Commentary: What 'Dark Waters' reveals about corporate science." {Bloomberg Opinion} Morning Call, December 3, 2019.](#)

A new movie, "Dark Waters," shines a bright light on a group of dangerous chemicals that are likely in your bloodstream right now. It tells the true story of a polluter that manipulated research and kept evidence hidden from the public — and shows just how crucial it is that scientific evidence be produced by researchers free of conflicts of interest.

The chemicals that drive the film's drama, known as PFAS, are remarkably effective at repelling water and oil. They're used to make familiar products such as Teflon, Scotchgard and Gore-Tex, and are found in the coating of pizza boxes and microwave-popcorn bags.

Unfortunately, in recent years, they've also gained attention for their links to cancer, liver and thyroid disease, increased cholesterol, and depressed fertility. They've been found in the blood of almost every American ever tested, and they contaminate the water in communities across the U.S.

“Dark Waters” focuses on how the chemical company DuPont manufactured Teflon in a West Virginia town, and in the process fouled the local drinking water with a PFAS compound. Over the course of the drama, viewers learn that DuPont hid much of what it knew about its effects. In 1981, for example, DuPont was informed by 3M (from which DuPont purchased much of its C8) that the chemical caused birth defects in rats; DuPont then learned of two apparent birth defects among children of its Teflon division employees.

When the first public concerns about the compound emerged, DuPont did what too many corporations do: They took a page from Big Tobacco’s playbook and hired a firm to sow doubt about the scientific evidence.

The film captures how a courageous attorney working virtually on his own was able to document DuPont’s coverup. Armed with those documents, the Environmental Protection Agency eventually issued its then largest-ever fine, and required DuPont to clean up the local water supply.

We badly need a new model for production of the evidence necessary to protect the public. When government agencies consider potentially harmful exposures and activities, from vaping to opioids to glyphosate to payday loans, they should insist the regulated industries provide data produced by unconflicted scientists.

It’s Thursday, December 5, do you know where your local Climate Action Plan is?