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Environmental Issues

April 2005

NEWSLETTER NO. 31



Earth Day is a time to celebrate gains we have made
and create new visions to accelerate environmental progress.
Earth Day is a time to unite around new actions.
Earth Day and every day is a time to act to protect our planet.

Energy issues are critical to the earth's environment. For Earth Day 2005 – April 22 – the Washington File is featuring a series of articles on renewable energy, an increasingly hopeful element in future energy calculations.

**Solar Cells Increasing Use of Electricity from Sunlight
Photovoltaic technology a multibillion-dollar market worldwide
By Cheryl Pellerin
Washington File Staff Writer**

Washington -- Turning sunlight into energy – solar energy – has been a dream of inventors at least since 1861, when the first sun-powered motor was patented in France. Today, innovation, investment and technology advances have produced solar technologies that generate power and reduce stress on a critical electricity infrastructure.

<http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/Archive/2005/Apr/19-464962.html>

**Organic Material Largest U.S. Source of Renewable Energy
Biofuels, biorefineries promising technologies in development
By Cheryl Pellerin
Washington File Staff Writer**

Washington – Biomass, defined as any organic material, is one of the most familiar sources of renewable energy. Sawmill waste, forest thinnings, agricultural byproducts, animal and human waste, and the organic components of municipal and industrial waste all qualify as biomass.

Such materials can be burned to generate electricity and, unlike other renewable resources, can be converted directly into liquid fuels for transportation. Even methane fumes from landfills can be used as biomass.

http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/environment/earth_day.html

G o v e r n m e n t D o c u m e n t s**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
April 21, 2005
MEDIA NOTE****United States Marks 35th Anniversary of Earth Day**

As the United States marks Earth Day, there is much to celebrate. The environment of the United States is healthier today than it was 35 years ago when America celebrated the first Earth Day. Although complex environmental challenges remain, the United States is committed to confronting them and continuing its longstanding stewardship of the nation's air, water, and land. As a key player in this effort, the State Department advances a robust array of international environmental initiatives. A small sampling follows. For more information, please see: www.state.gov/g/oes.

Sustainable Development: The leading donor nation in the world, the United States provides \$19 billion annually in official development assistance (almost a doubling since 2000) to accelerate economic growth and social development and enhance environmental stewardship in developing nations. Additionally, the United States has joined or launched hundreds of public/private partnerships in these critical areas. The Safe Water System Partnership, for example, has distributed or sold at low cost about 8 million bottles of disinfectant solution, providing safe drinking water to thousands of people.

Climate Change: The State Department has initiated 14 bilateral climate partnerships with countries and regional organizations that, with the United States, account for more than 70% of the global greenhouse gas emissions. Also, the Administration's 2005 budget includes \$5.2 billion for climate-related activities, including five cutting edge multilateral energy initiatives to develop technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions globally, and the Group on Earth Observations, an international partnership to improve our ability to understand planetary change.

Biodiversity: To promote global biodiversity, the United States secures protections for dozens of species. Through the International Coral Reef Initiative, the United States ensures that coral reefs remain vibrant, viable ecosystems. The United States has also launched an historic effort with 25 Western Hemisphere nations to conserve that region's migratory wildlife.

Forests: The United States is spearheading the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, a \$53 million

initiative to establish networks of protected areas and improve forest management across central Africa. Joined by over 30 partners, we have the potential to develop 27 national parks and protect more than 25 million acres of land. Through the President's Initiative Against Illegal Logging, the United States is safeguarding forest ecosystems worldwide, including in post-conflict Liberia.

Oceans/Fisheries: The United States is pioneering new techniques to crack down on illegal fishing worldwide. It also leads efforts to limit the capacity of the world's fishing fleet to sustainable levels and to prevent marine mammals and seabirds from being accidentally swept into fishing nets or hooked in longline fishing operations.

International Conventions: The United States participates in more than 200 international environmental treaty negotiations including those to protect the ozone layer, preserve wetlands, safeguard endangered species, and reduce hazardous chemicals.

(end text)

(Distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State.

Web site:

<http://usinfo.state.gov>)

United States Bans Ozone-Depleting Inhalers After December 2008

Action consistent with obligations under Montreal Protocol, FDA says

Washington – Distribution of the medication albuterol in metered-dose inhalers pressurized with ozone-depleting substances will be banned after December 31, 2008, under a final rule adopted by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) April 4.

The rule fulfills the agency's obligations under both the federal Clean Air Act and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, according to FDA. The agency cited reduced emissions of ozone-depleting substances, financial returns to industry on investments in environmentally friendly technology and international cooperation as the major benefits of the new rule.

<http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/Archive/2005/Apr/05-17549.html>

05AD412 FRESHWATER PROGRAMS: FEDERAL AGENCIES' FUNDING IN THE UNITED STATES AND ABROAD. [GAO-05-253]

United States Government Accountability Office (GAO). March 11, 2005.

As the world's population tripled during the past century, demand for the finite amount of freshwater resources increased six-fold, straining these resources for many countries, including the United States. The United Nations estimates that, worldwide, more than 1 billion people live without access to clean drinking water and over 2.4 billion people lack the basic sanitation needed for human health. Freshwater supply shortages—already evident in the drought-ridden western United States—pose serious challenges and can have economic, social, and environmental consequences. For the purposes of this report, freshwater programs include desalination, drinking water supply, flood control, irrigation, navigation, wastewater treatment, water conservation, water dispute management, and watershed management.

Of the over \$52 billion in total financial support provided by federal agencies for freshwater programs during fiscal years 2000 through 2004, about \$49 billion was directed to domestic programs and about \$3 billion supported programs abroad. Of the estimated \$3 billion in total financial support directed toward freshwater programs abroad between fiscal years 2000 through 2004, about \$1 billion was recently provided for freshwater projects in Afghanistan and Iraq. Most of the financial support for international freshwater programs was provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Foreign wastewater treatment and watershed management programs were the programs that most of the agencies supported. The vast majority of the U.S. support for international programs was provided through grants. Not included in the \$3 billion for international support are the contributions that the United States made to the general budgets of numerous international organizations, such as the United Nations and the World Bank. The international organizations used some portion of the U.S. contributions to support freshwater activities around the globe.

<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05253.pdf> [pdf format, 71 pages]

Think Tanks and International Organizations

HERITAGE FOUNDATION

Keep Ethanol Out of The Energy Bill
by Ben Lieberman
WebMemo #713 April 8, 2005

Included in the pending energy bill are provisions requiring the use of ethanol in the gasoline supply. This proposed ethanol mandate would raise the cost of gasoline, running against the original purpose of the energy bill—to make energy more affordable. For that reason, the mandate should have no place in the energy bill.

<http://www.heritage.org/Research/EnergyandEnvironment/wm713.cfm?renderforprint=1>

NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL

MEDICINES FROM THE DEEP: The Importance of Protecting the High Seas
from Bottom Trawling
Principal Author: Sara Maxwell, Marine Conservation Biology Institute, Redmond, Washington
Natural Resources Defense Council. Issue paper: March 2005

Although deep ocean exploration is still in its infancy, many scientists now believe that the deep sea harbors some of the most diverse ecosystems on earth. This diversity holds tremendous potential for human benefit. More than 15,000 natural products have been discovered from marine microbes, algae, and invertebrates, and this number continues to grow.¹ The uses of marine-derived compounds are varied, but the most exciting potential uses lie in the medical realm. More than 28 marine natural products are currently being tested in human clinical trials,

with many more in various stages of preclinical development. To date, most marketed marine products have come from shallow and often tropical marine organisms, due mainly to the ease of collecting them. But increasing scientific interest is now being focused on the potential medical uses of organisms found in the deep sea, much of which lies in international waters. These organisms have developed unique adaptations that enable them to survive in dark, cold, and highly pressurized environments. Their novel biology offers a wealth of opportunities for pharmaceutical and medical research. This report documents the large and growing body of scientific evidence

<http://www.nrdc.org/water/oceans/medicines/contents.asp>

NASA

Explosions in Space May Have Initiated Ancient Extinction on Earth 04.06.05

Scientists at NASA and the University of Kansas say that a mass extinction on Earth hundreds of millions of years ago could have been triggered by a star explosion called a gamma-ray burst. The scientists do not have direct evidence that such a burst activated the ancient extinction. The strength of their work is their atmospheric modeling -- essentially a "what if" scenario.

The scientists calculated that gamma-ray radiation from a relatively nearby star explosion, hitting the Earth for only ten seconds, could deplete up to half of the atmosphere's protective ozone layer. Recovery could take at least five years. With the ozone layer damaged, ultraviolet radiation from the Sun could kill much of the life on land and near the surface of oceans and lakes, and disrupt the food chain.

http://www.nasa.gov/vision/universe/starsgalaxies/gammaray_extinction.html

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

Scientists Study Environmental Sustainability of Nanomaterials, March 16, 2005

[...] "This research is providing the information to make practices sustainable when fullerene production comes on line," said Georgia Tech research scientist John Fortner. "It's our goal to minimize environmental impact in contrast to the pollution caused in the past by, for example, dry cleaning industry practices."

..The studies are under the auspices of the Rice Center for Biological and Environmental Nanotechnology, which is funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF).

http://www.usembassy.it/file2005_03/alia/a5032112.htm

MILLENNIUM ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT

Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) Synthesis Report March 30, 2005

A landmark study released today reveals that approximately 60 percent of the ecosystem services that support life on Earth - such as fresh water, capture fisheries, air and water regulation, and the regulation of regional climate, natural hazards and pests - are being degraded or used unsustainably. Scientists warn that the harmful consequences of this degradation could grow significantly worse in the next 50 years.

The U.S. government does not take an official position on this report, according to the State Department, but does regard it as another contribution to the body of work on sustainability and ecosystem management. U.S. officials also point out that the United States is leading a variety of international initiatives on health, water, tropical forests, energy and wildlife conservation to improve sustainability.

The MA Report was compiled under the auspices of the World Bank and the United Nations but received funding from a variety of international organizations and donors, including the U.S. Agency for International Development and NASA.

<http://www.uspolicy.be/Article.asp?ID=B2CD1C0C-A97D-44D8-B74C-C9F275B01836>

PEW CENTER ON GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

05AD420 PEW CENTER ASSESSMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION EMISSIONS TRADING SCHEME.

Pew Center on Global Climate Change. February 2005.

On January 1, 2005 the world's first large-scale greenhouse gas emissions trading program opened for business – the European Union's Emissions Trading Scheme (EU-ETS) – covering installations across all 25 EU member states. This document explains the background and framework of the EU-ETS, and explores the uncertainties and potential lessons from this landmark climate policy.

The report's authors acknowledge that there are few lessons to be immediately learned from the EU-ETS, but note that: "Directly relevant to U.S. policy makers is the application of insights from the EU-ETS to U.S. domestic GHG trading proposals, notably the Climate Stewardship Act, introduced by Senators McCain and Lieberman and voted on by the U.S. Senate (SA.2028) in October 2003 and reintroduced on February 10, 2005. In terms of overall size, the two programs are roughly equivalent—given the reporting threshold that would be established under SA.2028 (10,000 metric tons CO₂ equivalent). Publicly available data suggests that approximately 10,000 manufacturing facilities, 2,200 landfills, and 1,600 power plants would be included under this GHG trading program."

<http://www.pewclimate.org/docUploads/EU%20ETS%20White%20Paper%20Epdf> [pdf format, 20 pages]

UNITED NATIONS

Ozone-Friendly Chemicals Add to Global Warming, U.N. Report Finds Report addresses global-warming contribution of chlorofluorocarbons, replacements

After 20 years of protecting stratospheric ozone with a new generation of chemicals, governments are realizing that ozone-friendly substitutes for chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) are greenhouse gases that contribute to global

warming.

According to an April 11 U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP) press release, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Technology and Economic Assessment Panel (TEAP) have produced a special report, *Safeguarding the Ozone Layer and the Global Climate System: Issues Related to Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) and Perfluorocarbons (PFCs)*.

<http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/Archive/2005/Apr/13-218634.html>

THE WORLD CONSERVATION UNION (IUCN)

Scientists Unite In Call For Action As Global Food Demands Threaten To Outstrip World Water Supply

April 20, 2005

While many of today's rivers, lakes and groundwater reservoirs continue to be overexploited, a new report launched today by leading scientists at the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development warns that unless steps are taken to improve the way water is managed, twice the world's current water consumption may be needed by 2050 to feed a global population of some 9 billion. The scientists from the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), World Conservation Union (IUCN) and International Water Management Institute (IWMI) said that the ambitious international commitment to halve the number of people facing hunger have missed a fundamental question: where is the water needed to grow the food to feed future generations properly? The report, "Let It Reign: The New Water Paradigm for Global Food Security" points out that feeding the world is in many ways a daunting water challenge.

http://www.iucn.org/info_and_news/press/2005-csd-report-food.pdf

FROM COWS TO KILOWATTS AND BERRIES INTO BUSINESSES - WINNERS OF THE FIRST SEED AWARDS ANNOUNCED

April 20, 2005

An environmentally-friendly way of growing rice and a project to cultivate a highly versatile berry found at the roof of the world are among the winners of a new sustainable development award. They are joined by a community-based marine protected area in the Indian Ocean, an innovative water supply scheme in Latin America and a power-plant in West Africa that turns cattle waste into energy. The five winners of the Supporting Entrepreneurs for Environment and Development (Seed) Initiative awards will be honored in a special ceremony in New York on 20th April 2005 during the 13th Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. The winners, selected from a pool of over 260 entries from 66 countries, representing 1,200 organizations, have been chosen for their potential to advance sustainable development in their communities and contribute to the UN's Millennium Development Goals.

http://www.iucn.org/info_and_news/press/seed-awards-2005-w.pdf

Saving Nature For A Dry Day

April 18, 2005

The sustainable use of ecosystems is the basis for development and poverty alleviation. That is the position

the World Conservation Union will put forward at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD13) meeting underway in New York (11-22 April). The suggested priorities for action are providing environmental flows, involving stakeholders, strengthening governance, and using economic incentives for sustainable water use. "Making the services of ecosystems to water supply visible is crucial to change the trend of overuse and pollution of water, and degradation of valuable ecosystems", says Dr. Ger Bergkamp, head of the IUCN delegation in New York.

http://www.iucn.org/info_and_news/press/csd13-statement.pdf

A r t i c l e s f r o m U . S . J o u r n a l s

Shaping the Future

Scientific American, March 28, 2005

By Steven W. Popper, Robert J. Lempert and Steven C. Bankes

Scientific uncertainty often becomes an excuse to ignore long-term problems, such as climate change. It doesn't have to be so ...

Last year a high-profile panel of experts known as the Copenhagen Consensus ranked the world's most pressing environmental, health and social problems in a prioritized list. Assembled by the Danish Environmental Assessment Institute under its then director, Bjørn Lomborg, the panel used cost-benefit analysis to evaluate where a limited amount of money would do the most good. It concluded that the highest priority should go to immediate concerns with relatively well understood cures, such as control of malaria. Long-term challenges such as climate change, where the path forward and even the scope of the threat remain unclear, ranked lower.

http://www.sciam.com/print_version.cfm?articleID=000935E5-CCA0-1238-8CA083414B7FFE9F

AA05112 EARTHQUAKE RISK FROM CO-SEISMIC STRESS

Mccloskey, John; Nalbant, Suleyman S.; Steacy, Sandy

Nature Vol. 434, March 17, 2005

Summary: After the massive loss of life caused by the December 2004 Sumatra earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia, the possibility of a triggered earthquake on a nearby subduction (a geologic process in which the edge of one crustal plate is forced below the edge of another) zone is a real concern. The authors -- at the University of Ulster School of Environmental Sciences in the United Kingdom -- calculated the amount of post-earthquake stress on this zone and on another nearby fault, and found that an increase in stress on both structures significantly boosts the existing and considerable earthquake hazard. Considering past activity and the observed structural complexity on the northern Sumatra fault, which generated the December earthquake, they said an earthquake of magnitude 7 to 7.5 on this structure seems to represent the greatest immediate threat. The authors recommended establishing a tsunami warning system in the area as soon as possible. [GIC;CLP]

AA05099 OUR PREFERRED POISON**Wright, Karen****Discover Vol. 26, No. 3, March 2005, pp. 58-65**

Summary: Mercury occurs throughout the world and is used in products such as dental fillings, pesticides, vaccines, thermometers and batteries. It is released by many industrial processes and coal-fired power plants and accumulates in fish. It can be very toxic to humans, depending on its form and route of exposure. Some studies suggest low levels of exposure may cause cell damage associated with learning difficulties in children and heart disease in adults, and there may be a link to other diseases such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, multiple sclerosis, and autism. Methylmercury ingested from contaminated fish has been found in the fatty molecules in the brain, although scientists do not know how it inflicts damage or at what level of exposure. Children appear to be more susceptible than adults because their brains are still developing. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has removed mercury as a preservative in most childhood vaccines and advised women of childbearing age to limit their consumption of several species of large fish known to contain high levels of mercury. Scientists urge greater regulation to reduce exposure, whether from consuming contaminated fish or breathing smokestack emissions, while safe levels of exposure are being redefined. Wright is a contributing editor for Discover. Available at <http://www.discover.com/issues/mar-05/features/our-preferred-poison/>.

AA05082 FUTURE SHOCKS: MODERN SCIENCE, ANCIENT CATASTROPHES, AND THE ENDLESS QUEST TO PREDICT EARTHQUAKES**Krajick, Kevin****Smithsonian vol. 35, no. 12, March 2005, pp. 38-46**

Summary: The combined findings and calculations of U.S. and Japanese researchers have proven that a devastating tsunami swept ashore in what is now the Pacific Northwest state of Washington in January 1700. The discoveries of paleoseismologists -- those who study earthquakes of the past -- are shedding new light on the risks that the region faces for future earthquakes and tsunamis, and the devastation that could come with them. Hundreds of bridges and tall buildings in the metropolitan areas of Seattle, Washington and Portland, Oregon could be at risk if a quake of similar magnitude were to occur again. Though scientists are finding that earthquakes defy predictability, they are learning much more about their likelihood from clues that seismic events left behind centuries ago. That information is invaluable for urban planners and engineers to better assess construction safety requirements and emergency planning. Available online at <http://www.smithsonianmag.com>. [GIC;MCP]

AA05068 MONITORING ELUSIVE MAMMALS**Sanderson, James G.; Trolle, Mogens****American Scientist Vol. 93, No. 2, March-April 2005, pp. 148-155**

Summary: Camera traps provide direct proof of elusive mammals, their habitat and population, and help scientists identify the species and their probability of endangerment. When the Convention on Biological Diversity was ratified in 1992, a program was initiated called Tropical, Ecology, Assessment and Monitoring, or TEAM. The goal of TEAM is to set up research centers around the world, installing cameras in high-habitation regions to record mammals in their environment. The cameras are triggered when the sensors detect movement, and have produced brilliant pictures of some of the world's most elusive species, as well as identified at least one new species. With that information and using a population matrix principle, scientists have been able to identify a particular animal within a 2-day period. Once identified, the continuous photographs reveal how many of

that species traveled through the area in the given days, and a population per square mile can be calculated. [GIC;KJB]

AA05067 HOW DID HUMANS FIRST ALTER GLOBAL CLIMATE?

Ruddiman, William R.

Scientific American Vol. 292, No. 3, March 2005, pp. 46-53

Summary: Conventional wisdom has it that the start of the industrial era set global warming in motion. Ruddiman, marine geologist and professor emeritus of environmental sciences, University of Virginia, offers his provocative and controversial hypothesis that human-induced global warming began thousands of years earlier. He provides evidence that deforestation and development of agriculture began to increase carbon dioxide and methane (the "greenhouse gases") more than 8,000 years ago. The increased concentrations of these gases offset in part the decline expected from the natural cycle of gas concentrations recorded over millions of years, slowed earth's cooling, and delayed onset of the next ice age. He expects the rapid warming of the industrial era to continue until fossil fuels become scarce in about 200 years, but he states that it is impossible to predict whether the planet will remain warm enough to avoid another ice age. [GIC;JRT]

AA05065 THE IRONY OF CLIMATE

Halweil, Brian

World Watch vol. 18, no. 2, March/April 2005, pp. 18-23

Summary: While scientists debate on the pace and effects of global warming and climate change, the author notes that farmers around the world are already dealing with increasing erratic weather, previously unknown pests, desertification, more severe storms and altered growing seasons. Halweil notes that most of the agricultural crops that humanity has bred over the millennia were intended to thrive in a stable climate. To deal with these unexpected climatic changes, farmers may have to diversify their crops to ensure a sufficient food supply and engage in long-term "carbon farming," such as planting trees, to absorb the built-up carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Additionally, agriculture will have to become much more energy-efficient, and will very likely need to return to a more localized distribution system, as shipping goods over long distances becomes more expensive and precarious. [TEM;GWB]

AA05052 THE GREENING OF EVANGELICALS

Harden, Blaine

Washington Post February 6, 2005, p. A1

Summary: There is a growing awareness of environmental issues among conservative Christian evangelicals; while they are wary of established environmental organizations, increasing numbers of evangelicals regard stewardship of the environment as a duty mandated by the Bible. Last fall, leaders of the National Association of Evangelicals adopted a first-ever "Call to Civic Responsibility" for Christians to care for the environment and the role of the government in promoting sustainability. The Christian evangelical movement has been active in campaigns on global warming and reducing mercury poisoning, issues that may put them at odds with the Bush administration and Republican Congressional lawmakers. This is significant, notes the author, because Christian evangelicals are politically active; almost 80 percent of them voted for President Bush, constituting a third of the votes he received in 2004. Mainstream environmental organizations have begun trying to make common cause with the Christian right on environmental issues, after many years of mutual suspicion.

AA05051 INVASION OF THE SNAKEHEADS!**Fields, Helen****Smithsonian Vol. 35, No. 11, February 2005, pp. 62-70**

Summary: Wildlife biologists and fishermen have been alarmed by recent discovery of northern snakeheads, a carnivorous fish native to Asia, in California, Lake Michigan, and the Maryland tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay. While freshwater ecosystems in the U.S. may be home to many introduced species, the voracious snakehead has the potential to drive native species to extinction. In addition, the northern snakehead is air-breathing and capable of traveling overland. The specimens discovered at large were very likely released from aquariums or from the live food fish trade; as a result, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has banned the importation of live snakeheads. Its toothy, fierce appearance has spawned several "monster" television movies. Some fear that the fish will reproduce rampantly, posing a serious risk to native ecosystems and local economies. Dr. Thomas Orrell, ichthyologist at the Smithsonian, will have some answers when his studies of snakehead habits are published. Available online (without photos) at <http://www.smithsonianmag.si.edu>. [GIC;LDS]

AA05022 THE SOLUTION**Tucker, William****American Enterprise vol. 16, no. 1, January/February 2005, pp. 20-26**

Summary: The author describes the current energy predicament facing the U.S., and argues that nuclear power is the only viable solution to the U.S.' future energy needs. He notes that oil and gas supplies are projected to decline over the long term, and use of hydrogen in the transportation sector, though efficient, requires a great deal of electrical energy to generate; wind and solar power installations, though non-polluting, require large tracts of land. The dangers surrounding nuclear power have been blown out of proportion, in his view. He describes several new reactor designs, including a proposed Accelerator-Driven Subcritical (ADS) system, that generates nuclear energy only when fed neutrons by a particle accelerator, and is a nuclear "omnivore," capable of consuming even radioactive waste from conventional reactors. [TEM;GWB]

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Szilágyi Ágota
475-4442

Keve Ildikó
475-4478

Bíró Katalin
475-4514

Staff of the Information Resource Center

e-mail: infousa@usembassy.hu

FAX: 475-47-08