

Scientist Disagrees With Gloomy Outlook On Man and Ecology

A highly interesting article, "The Eight Surprises or has the world gone to Hell?", which purports to eliminate many fallacies concerning the earth's ecology, has come to our attention. The author is John J. McKetta, Department of Chemical Engineering of the University of Texas and Chairman of the National Air Quality Commission. Although very technical, excerpts follow:

"From what we read and hear it would seem that we are on the edge of impending doom. A scientific evaluation of the evidence does not support this conclusion. Of course we have some undesirable problems attributed to technological activities. The solution of these problems will require a technical understanding of their nature not through emotion. They cannot be solved unless properly identified, which will require more technically trained people - not less. I agree, as Thomas Jefferson did, that if the public is properly informed, the people will make wise decisions. The public has not been getting all of the facts on matters relating to ecology.

It bothers me that there are so many purveyors of gloom who talk about the hopelessness of our future. . .

We're all deeply concerned about reports of the destruction of our environment as a result of technological recklessness, overpopulation, and the lack of consideration to the preservation of nature. As Chairman of the National Air Quality Commission I have to read great amounts of technical literature in this area. I've turned up a lot of evidence that I'd like to share with you. . .

1- Why Is The Oxygen Disappearing???

My first surprise concerns the air we breathe. You have been reading that we are seriously depleting the oxygen in the atmosphere and replacing it with toxic substances such as carbon monoxide.

Throughout my formal education I have always been taught that oxygen in our atmosphere is supplied by green plants using the process of photosynthesis. . .

Surprise number one is that most of the oxygen in the atmosphere doesn't come from photosynthesis. The evidence is now overwhelming that photosynthesis is just inadequate to have produced the amount of oxygen that is present in our atmosphere. . .

The significance of this information is that the supply of oxygen in the atmosphere is virtually unlimited. . . If all the organic material on earth oxidized, it would reduce the atmospheric concentration of oxygen by less than one percent. We can forget the depletion of oxygen in the atmosphere and get on with the solution of more serious problems.

2. Carbon Monoxide Will Kill Us All!

As you know, the most toxic component of automobile exhaust is carbon monoxide. . . Most of this comes from automobiles. . . Since the ratio of automobiles in the northern and southern hemisphere is 9:1 respectively, it was expected that the northern hemisphere would have a much higher concentration of atmospheric carbon monoxide. The true measurements show, however that there is no difference in CO amounts between the hemispheres and that the overall concentration in the air is not increasing at all. In fact they've found higher concentrations of CO over the Atlantic and Pacific oceans than over land???

Early in 1971 scientists at the Stanford Research Institute in Palo Alto disclosed that they had done some experiments in smog chambers containing soil. . . They quickly identified the organisms responsible for CO removal to be fungi of the aspergillus (bread mold and penicillin types). These organisms, on a world-wide basis, are using all of the 270 million tons of the CO made by man for their own metabolism, thus enriching the soils of the forest and the fields.

This does not say carbon monoxide is any less toxic. It does say that, in spite of man's activities, carbon monoxide will never build up in the atmosphere to a dangerous level except on a localized basis. . .

Here lies surprise number two for you - do you know that the CO content of cigarette smoke is 42,000 ppm? The CO concentration in practically any smoke filled room grossly exceeds the safety standards we allow in our laboratories. . .

In the broad expanse of our natural air, CO levels are totally safe for human beings.

3. Oxides of Nitrogen Will Choke Us!

. . . Oxides of nitrogen are definitely problems in places where temperature inversions trap the air.

But we've all known for many years that nature, in addition to man, also produced oxides of nitrogen. The number three surprise (and shock) is that most of the oxides of nitrogen come from nature. . .

The significance of this is that even if we are 100 percent successful in our removal of the oxides of nitrogen from combustion gases, we will still have more than 99 percent left in the atmosphere which is produced by nature. Sometimes I think nature laughs at us.

4. The Death Of Lake Erie

We've all read for some time that Lake Erie is dead. It's

true that. . . the oxygen content at the bottom of the lake is decreasing. This is called eutrophication. The blame has been placed on phosphates as the cause of this situation. . . In fact for several years phosphate detergents were taken off the market. . .

Now let's look at the scientific evidence that I've been able to find on the subject. The study shows that the cause of the eutrophication of Lake Erie has not been properly defined. This evidence suggests that if we totally stopped using phosphate detergents it would have no effect whatever on the eutrophication of Lake Erie. . .

Our garbage disposal units do far more to pollute Lake Erie than do the phosphate detergents. If we put in the proper sewage treatment facilities, the lake will sparkle blue again in a very few years.

5. DDT Is The Worst Thing That Ever Happened To Us???

DDT and other chlorinated compounds are supposedly endangering the lives of mankind and eliminating some bird species by the thinning of the egg shells of birds. . . From the readings that I have done, the experiments were conducted in such a manner that positive conclusions could not be drawn from them. Even if it is true, it's quite possible that the desirable properties of DDT so greatly outnumber the undesirable ones that it might prove to be a serious mistake to ban entirely this remarkable chemical.

Many of you heard Dr. Norman E. Borlaug, the Nobel Peace prize winner. He is opposed to the banning of DDT. Obviously he is a competent scientist. He won the Nobel prize because he was able to develop a new strain of wheat that can double the food production per acre anywhere in the world that it is grown.

Dr. Borlaug said "If DDT is banned by the United States, I have wasted my life's work. . . Without DDT and other important agricultural chemicals, our goals are simply unattainable. . ."

According to the World Health Organization, malaria fatalities alone dropped from four million a year in the 1930's to less than one million per year in 1968. . . Surprise number five is that it has been estimated that 100 million human beings who would have died of these afflictions are alive today because of DDT. Incidentally, recent tests indicate that the thinning of bird egg shells may have been caused by mercury compounds rather than DDT! Oh hum!

6. We're Killing Off Too Many Species!

Many people feel that mankind is responsible for the disappearance of the animal species. . . About 50 species are expected to disappear this century. It is also true that 50 species became extinct last century and 50 species the century before that and so on. . . Animals come and animals disappear. This is the essence of evolution as Mr. Darwin pointed out many years ago. Mankind is a

[Continued on Page 64]



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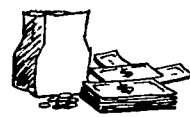
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