A Cleanup Plan for Chesapeake Bay

Calling it a reaffirmation of cooperation and commitment among federal and state governments, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Thomas on 20 September released a broad plan to clean up the Chesapeake Bay, the nation's largest estuary.

For decades the Chesapeake Bay, which spans 64,000 square miles and supplies a major portion of the nation's blue crabs and oysters, has been a huge sink catching farm runoff, sewage, and industrial waste from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. Two years ago, in an unusual cooperative agreement, top officials from these jurisdictions and from the federal government vowed to do their part to clean up the bay. The new plan catalogs for the first time the environmental targets that each government has set for itself.

No new additional funding, however, was announced. At a press conference, Thomas, the governors from the three states, and Washington's mayor emphasized that cleanup would take years and, as Maryland Governor Harry Hughes put it, the plan was "an important beginning." One EPA official said that the importance of the document, "The Chesapeake Bay Restoration and Protection Plan," is that it will serve as a yardstick to measure progress.

The plan lists dozens of programs that the states, Washington, and EPA hope to implement. The biggest goals are to reduce the bay's levels of nitrogen, phosphorus, and toxic substances, including heavy metals and pesticides. Pennsylvania's Susquehanna River Basin, for example, supplies half of the Chesapeake's water and is also a major agricultural area that contaminates the bay with runoff containing livestock waste, fertilizers, and topsoil. Susquehanna farms account for three-quarters or more of the phosphorus and nitrogen loads into the basin. With the help of federal aid, Pennsylvania is trying to encourage better farm management.

All of the states and Washington also plan to improve sewage treatment and the regulation of discharges from industrial plants, which are the major sources of toxic substances that pollute the bay.

Rodney Coggin, a spokesman for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, one of many grass-roots environmental groups that has spurred cleanup action, said that the plan "has no new promises. But it tells everyone that everything is on track." By specifying what the governments plan to do, officials "have gone out on a limb" and put themselves on notice. "We're delighted," Coggin said.

—MARJORIE SUN

Science Textbooks Too Bland for California

In a decision that will reverberate through the U.S. public schools, California has rejected all the new science books proposed for seventh and eighth graders as sloppy in their treatment of evolution. California's complaint differs from that of other states. It found the textbooks too cautious in supporting Charles Darwin's heritage, and too deferential to creationism.

California's school board voted unanimously on 13 September not to accept any of next year's crop of junior high school science textbooks until they are rewritten. The board was led in this action by the new superintendent of public instruction, Bill Honig. He took office in 1983 after being elected on a tide of reformist sentiment.

The texbook publishers have been given until 15 October to respond and until February to revise the texts if they want them considered for the next academic year.

The issue, Honig says, is not whether the books are pro- or anti-evolutionist but whether they provide a good education. He says, "You just can't teach modern biology without giving a good understanding of evolution." The problem is that publishers have tried to "duck controversy" by watering down the words. "We're saying to the publishers, 'Look, you may be worried about what special interest groups think of the books, but you've also got to worry about the main event.' We just wanted to add our two cents—really our $115 million worth." California spends $115 million a year on books for public school children, 11 percent of the national total.

It's not just the sciences that suffer, according to Honig. "The same thing has happened to history and literature." He asks, "Have you read any of these books? They're written like a committee report." Science books were just the first to come up for review. Math and literature texts will be reviewed next.

Some publishers may be able to adapt easily. For example, Loren Korte, president of D.C. Heath Company's school division, says the changes being requested are "educationally sound" and therefore will be written into the new books. Other companies may try to offer special supplements for the California schools. But Honig says only a thorough revision will be acceptable in most cases.—ELIOT MARSHALL

Pesticide Pact Struck by Opposing Groups

The pesticide industry and a coalition of environmental, consumer, and labor groups recently struck an agreement that would greatly strengthen federal law governing pesticides.

"We're two boxers who have taken off their gloves and shaken hands," said Al Meyerhoff, an attorney for the National Resources Defense Council, who helped negotiate the agreement.

For several years, Congress, the environmental coalition, and the pesticide industry trade group, the National Agricultural Chemicals Association (NACA), have been at an impasse, battling over changes in federal pesticide law. But the environmental group was able to extract major concessions from the pesticide industry because the industry sorely wants other federal legislation passed that would lengthen the marketing life of patented pesticides.

In general, the agreement would force the Environmental Protection Agency to speed up its safety reviews of pesticides already on the market and would broaden public access to toxicity data.

The turning point came last year when key House and Senate legislators said they would put a hold on the patent legislation until industry agreed