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

to reforms in the pesticide law. NACA argues that federal testing requirements on pesticides subtract from a product's patent life.

The environmental coalition and NACA announced on 11 September that they had agreed in principle to changes in the law and characterized the agreement as a good first step toward writing specific legislation. The main provisions are as follows:

- It would set strict deadlines that force EPA to accelerate the review of hundreds of chemicals that are the active ingredients in 40,000 pesticides now sold. Congress told EPA 13 years ago to review these chemicals for their safety, but to date, the agency has analyzed less than a dozen of 600 active ingredients. Under the agreement, EPA would be given 2 years to analyze existing health and safety data on these chemicals. If the information is insufficient, pesticide companies would be required to conduct more tests within 4 to 5 years. Once EPA receives the new data, the agency would have 1 year to decide whether to reregister the chemical.
- In a significant concession, the pesticide manufacturers agreed in principle to pay a reregistration fee to help fund this review process.
- EPA's process to cancel the use of a particular pesticide that may pose significant health or environmental hazards would be compressed to 1 year. These special reviews are often protracted. It took EPA 7 years to ban ethylene dibromide, for example.
- The public would be given access to health and safety data about a pesticide before it is approved by EPA. Under current law, the information is available only after approval. Pesticide companies would also be required to give local communities access to information about what pesticides it makes, health and safety data, and where the chemical plants are located.
- Inert ingredients will be regulated for their safety, and companies will be required to list them on product labels.
- Companies would have to provide more information to countries importing pesticides that are not approved for use in the United States. They would have to inform the importing country if a product had been restricted and cancelled here and the reasons for the regulatory action.

One area that remains a potential stumbling block is how to regulate groundwater contamination. Meyerhoff says, "If we don't reach agreement on groundwater, we would have to assess whether to go forward with the agreement." Industry favors a cost–benefit approach whereas Meyerhoff says regulatory action by EPA should be triggered solely by evidence that a groundwater pollutant poses a health risk.

There is still a long road ahead before a final bill is passed. The two groups have to hammer out the specific language of a draft pesticide bill. And they are awaiting reaction by the farm community and the Administration. EPA's reaction to the agreement is guarded. James Davis of EPA says that "we are encouraged they can agree. Most of the questions we have are whether we can keep the reregistration deadlines and if the industry fees will cover the resources we will need."

But for the moment, Luther Shaw, a NACA spokesman, said, "We're optimistic that we've got a pretty good crack at getting legislation through this Congress. We've established a process here [with the coalition] that's not confrontational."—**MARJORIE SUN**

Soviets Target Campuses for Intelligence Operations

The Soviet Union routinely tries to obtain militarily sensitive data from American universities and international scientific conferences, according to a report* released by the Department of Defense on 18 September. Many of these attempts are successful, the report states, with the result that "millions of rubles" are saved by the Soviet military research establishment.

Although this is hardly a new theme at the Defense Department, the report contains some fresh details. It is based in large part on purloined Soviet documents, in which various arms of the Soviet bureaucracy have discussed the fruits of their technological snooping. Written by the U.S. Technology Transfer Intelligence Committee, which has representatives from 22 federal agencies and is directed by the Central Intelligence Agency, the report could figure prominently in future debates about government censorship of scientific information.

Specifically, it states that over 35 scientific conferences were identified by a group of senior Soviet industrialists in the late 1970's as potential sources of data on a wide range of military topics, including "missiles, engines, lasers, computers, marine technology, space, microelectronics, chemical engineering, radars, armaments, and optical communications." An international radar conference, for example, was identified as a potential source of information on electronic circuitry for air- and space-borne radars; a symposium on solar energy was identified as a potential source of information on coatings for military space vehicles; and a conference run by a branch of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers was identified as a potential source of information on low-altitude radars.

In addition, the Soviet Academy of Sciences and two other research groups are said to have targeted as many as 60 U.S. universities for both civilian and military intelligence-gathering efforts. The institutions cited most often by the Soviets are MIT, Carnegie-Mellon, Harvard, Michigan, Caltech, Princeton, Stanford, Cornell, Berkeley, and the Illinois Institute of Technology. Information was obtained from the academic community on a wide range of topics, the report states, including missiles and space systems, sonars, aerial photography, and lasers.

The stolen Soviet documents indicate that spying on American campuses may account for as much as one-fifth of their total effort, according to the report. But the information composed only 5 percent "of the technology judged most significant by the Soviets during the late 1970's and early 1980's." The report adds that there is a "rough correlation" between the number of military research needs identified by the Soviets and the number of visits to American universities by Soviet Bloc scientists with relevant expertise. "There is, however, little data indicating that specific scientists were tasked to acquire information for Soviet military research projects," the report says. ▶

* *Soviet Acquisition of Militarily Significant Western Technology: An Update*, available from the Public Correspondence Branch, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Room 2E777, Pentagon, Washington, D.C. 20301–1400.