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Information for Contributors appears on pages 112–114 of the 6 January 1995 issue. Editorial correspondence, including requests for permission to reprint and reprint orders, should be sent to 1333 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005.

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LETTERS

Hard questions

The environmental effects of dioxin-contaminated herbicides such as Agent Orange, sprayed by the U.S. military during the Vietnam War (mangrove forests south of Ho Chi Minh City in 1970, left, unsprayed; right, after spraying), have long been the subject of debate. A letter recommends follow-up study of those effects. Other letters discuss electronic publishing, the academic job market, and fusion.



Dioxins in Vietnam

With reestablishment of full diplomatic recognition of Vietnam by the U.S. government finally accomplished, it seems appropriate to ask why no studies of the environmental effects of dioxin [TCDD (tetrachlorodibenzodioxin)] in Vietnam have been undertaken by the U.S. government. In fact, the National Academy of Sciences in 1974 recommended that studies “be started immediately” (1). This apparent lack of concern on the part of our government contrasts with actions of Canada, Japan, and other countries. Canada has an extensive pilot program operating in the south of Vietnam helping to assist and further train Vietnamese scientists in methods of assessing degrees of dioxin contamination. The Canadians calculate that Vietnam, a country one-third the size of British Columbia, was subjected to annual environmental loadings of dioxin more than 150 times greater than annual worst-case loadings to the British Columbia environment as a result of pulp mill discharges (2). As a recent editorial (3) stated

(4) by urging Congress to fund a full-scale study of dioxin in Vietnam, offering its good services as desired.

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2. Hatfield Consultants, Ltd., personal communication to E. W. Pfeiffer.
3. J. Dwyer and D. Flesch-Janyo, *Am. J. Publ. Health* **85**, 476 (1995).
4. J. D. Constable, R. E. Cook, M. Meselson, A. H. Westing, *Science* **186**, 584 (1974); AAAS Herbicide Assessment Commission, *Congr. Rec.* **118**, 6806 (3 March 1972).

Electronic Publishing

In their editorial “‘Wired’ science or whither the printed page?” (4 Aug., p. 615), Shmuel Winograd and Richard N. Zare state that the scientific community must ask “some very hard questions” about electronic publishing. One point made by Winograd and Zare may lead readers to believe that electronic publishing precludes peer-review and that this results in rapid publishing. The speed of dissemination of electronic journals comes not from bypassing the peer-review process, but from