

## ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

Most Americans are environmentalists. They are concerned about the optimization of their own environments. They are careful to avoid actions that are harmful to the environments of others.

There are some people who toss litter from their automobile windows, but they are a small group. There are people who knowingly pollute streams, wantonly destroy irreplaceable natural resources, set forest fires, and engage in other types of anti-environmental behavior, but the number of such people is very small indeed. They have no support whatever from most Americans.

There is also a small group of people who are pseudoenvironmentalists. They pose as champions of the environment in order to further their own personal agendas. Actually, their actions are harmful to the overall environment of our country.

The pseudoenvironmentalists include not only the leadership and employees of some "non-profit" organizations that are in the "environmentalism" business, but also some businessmen who promote pseudoenvironmentalist causes that they believe will enhance the profitability of their own businesses. There is even a growing profession of "environmentalist executives" who occupy positions in corporations for the purpose of making the businesses look environmentally responsible. These executives promote all sorts of environmentally harmful projects in the name of public relations.

They promote, for example, paper recycling and generate advertising campaigns that promote their companies as being at the forefront of conservation efforts through their paper recycling programs. In fact, the proper way to recycle paper is simply to burn it. This turns the paper back into carbon dioxide. The carbon dioxide is then utilized by trees to make more wood. The wood is then manufactured into high quality paper. Where air quality is a problem, the burning needs to be carried out under conditions of nearly complete combustion, so that very little smoke will be produced.

The wrong way to recycle paper is to gather old paper in great piles; bale it with expensive machines and labor; transport it with trucks and trains that use large amounts of fuel; and then combine it with expensive chemicals in specialized manufacturing facilities that turn it into poor quality, second-hand paper. This is a high-cost, wasteful procedure. It is carried out only for the political purpose of convincing uninformed Americans that something "environmentally conscious" is being done.

I recall a conversation with the president of a company specializing in the disposal of radioactive waste. I told him about some conclusions another scientist and I had reached about radioactive waste disposal.

This waste is dangerous only if it remains concentrated in discrete locations. A disposal site for radioactive waste is a dangerous place unless a great many expensive precautions are taken. The site remains dangerous for a very long time. Why are people putting this waste in such concentrated locations? Radioactivity is all around us. If the waste were properly dispersed, then it would be no danger at all.

For example, we carried out some calculations showing that if all radioactive waste were properly pulverized and dissolved and then dispersed widely in the oceans, its presence there would be virtually undetectable. Slight variations in isotopic composition and the availability of sensitive measuring methods would allow its detection. The level of background radiation and toxic materials in the oceans would be, however, entirely unaffected. This procedure would cost very little