

EXTRACTIONS



a newsletter from O'CONNOR ASSOCIATES

Number 34 October 2000

WILDFIRES SPARK CONTROVERSY

With 2 million hectares of National Forest burned in the US this year alone, the US Forest Service (USFS) is proposing to protect the remaining 16 million hectares from flames — by chopping down some of the trees. The agency says by removing small trees and bushes, it can reduce the available fuel for fires without damaging larger trees or the forest itself. Logging advocates agree, arguing that logging reduces fire risk. "... if there is more wood in a forest, there is a stronger possibility of a fire there," said Derek Jumper, spokesperson for the American Forest and Paper Association. The Northwest Forestry Association, an industry group, blames the increased fires on federal policy that prevents "salvage logging" of dead or dying trees.

Some environmentalists — and some of the USFS's own experts — don't accept this theory, citing evidence that logging often *increases* the risk of fire in at least three ways:

- Logging generally leaves highly flammable slash
- Logging opens the forest canopy, which dries out the forest floor
- When thickly replanted, as often happens, a new plantation is much more flammable than the older forest it's replacing

They also claim that because the USFS's budget is directly tied to the sale of trees, the agency has a long history of doing what's best for its bottom line, and not what's best for the forests and wildlife.

Currently, US National Forests provide more economic benefits to local communities as standing trees than as cut logs. A report conducted by an independent economics firm and commissioned by the Sierra Club found that recreation in national forests generates 25 times more money (\$US 108 billion annually) and 34 times as many jobs (2.6 million) than does logging on those lands.

When the USFS releases its new plan, the public will learn who the agency has listened to.

[From *Environmental News Service*,
<<http://www.ens-news.com/ens/aug2000/2000L-08-24-06.html>>,
<<http://www.triax.com/bmnfa/myths.htm>>]

TO SLOW GLOBAL WARMING, CUT TREES

Another reason for logging may be to slow global warming. It's pretty clear that global warming is here, and that carbon dioxide (CO₂) increases are a primary cause. Dr. Hamish Kimmins, a professor of forest ecology at the University of B.C., analyzes forests and their carbon budgets. He suggests that cutting and replanting a climax forest may benefit the environment by reducing CO₂ in the atmosphere, provided the wood goes to long-lasting uses such as furniture and building construction.

Growing trees convert water and CO₂ into wood, binding carbon for the life of the tree. When a tree decomposes — whether quickly by fire or slowly by decay — its carbon is released to the air, and the cycle restarts.

"If the [harvested old-growth] trees go to short-term uses such as toilet paper," Dr. Kimmins says, "their carbon returns to the atmosphere within a few weeks and there is no net removal of CO₂. But if the harvested wood goes to longer-lasting uses, its carbon remains locked away while replacement saplings bind new carbon." This creates a net reduction in atmospheric CO₂.

[From *Env. Sci. & Eng.*, June 2000, p. 28]

MINES PRODUCING LETHAL AIR

Some residents of Partizansk in eastern Russia are donning gas-masks and ignoring official prohibitions to enter their basement pantries where they store locally grown vegetables. Things have deteriorated since 1996 when 5 mines closed, putting many of the 59 000 residents out of work. Now, with the mine pumps shut down, the water levels are rising, pushing mine air to the surface. The heavier air, a lethal mix containing 6 % carbon dioxide and only 2 % oxygen, is settling in cellars and basements.

Experts estimate that it will be two or three years before the mine waters reach the surface. When that happens, Partizansk's residents will face yet another problem — possible pollution of the town's water supply. Across Russia, 180 mines have closed since 1994.

[From *USA Today*, Friday, June 30, 2000, p. 18A]

GROUNDWATER REMEDIATION WITH VITAMIN B12

A new technology developed and patented by scientists at Environment Canada's National Water Research Institute could help clean up numerous sites in Canada and abroad, particularly sites having groundwater contaminated with chlorinated solvents in concentrations high enough to be toxic to bacteria and sites needing rapid remediation.

The US Army is testing the process of injecting a solution of vitamin B12 and titanium citrate into the contaminated groundwater at a site in Maryland, contaminated 40 years ago with a complex mixture of chlorinated methanes, ethanes, and ethenes that has not degraded over the years. Preliminary results show that chlorinated methanes degrade in minutes, while chlorinated ethanes degrade more slowly. The field demonstration will help the US Army choose a technology for cleaning the entire site.

[From *Environmental News Service*,
<<http://www.ens-news.com/ens/mar2000/2000L-03-29-09.html>>]

STUDY LINKS TOXINS TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS

The National Environmental Trust, Physicians for Social Responsibility, and the Learning Disabilities Association of America have just released a report entitled, "Polluting Our Future: Chemical Pollution in the U.S. that Affects Child Development and Learning."

The report links the 24 billion pounds of developmental and neurological toxins released into the environment of the US each year to millions of cases of developmental disabilities and recommends:

- pre-market screening of new chemicals
- mandatory testing of existing chemicals
- better product labelling
- better pollution reporting
- toxic chemical controls for electric power plants
- better exposure and disease monitoring

One in every 200 children in the US suffers from developmental and neurological deficits such as birth defects, attention deficit disorder, and autism that the report suggests are caused by exposure to known toxic substances. Also, the data show increases in low birthweight and premature births — two important risk factors for many physical and mental defects.

The largest emitters of developmental and neurological toxins are electric power utilities and makers of paper,

metals, and plastics. The printing industry is singled out as a high priority for change for three reasons:

- printers are the largest source of toluene (the most released developmental and neurological toxin)
- printing facilities are often close to residential areas
- safer technologies do exist

[From *Environmental News Service*,
<<http://ens.lycos.com/ens/sep2000/2000L-09-07-06.html>> and
<<http://www.safekidsinfo.org>>]

OF NOTE

Here are some other interesting items we've come across:

- Canada will spend \$20 million to help developing countries control persistent organic pollutants that become trapped in the Arctic.
[From *Environmental News Service*,
<<http://www.ens-news.com/ens/aug2000/2000L-08-14-10.html>>]
- A new laser spectroscopy technique measured tiny amounts of magnesium particles which remained in the air up to a week after a fireworks display.
[From *Environmental News Service*,
<<http://www.ens-news.com/ens/sep2000/2000L-09-07-09.html>>]
- Canada, the US, Japan, and other major countries have signed a UN agreement to develop global emission standards for motor vehicles.
[From *Environmental News Service*,
<<http://www.ens-news.com/ens/aug2000/2000L-08-29-07.html>>]
- A potent greenhouse gas (SF₅CF₃) has been discovered through analysis of Antarctic snow.
[From *Environmental News Service*,
<<http://www.ens-news.com/ens/jul2000/2000L-07-31-02.html>>]
- Composted manure from Alberta feedlots is being used successfully in oilpatch reclamation projects.
[From *Calgary Herald*, Friday, September 1, 2000, p. B4]
- The US EPA is reducing the amount of arsenic allowed in drinking water from 50 µg/L to 5 µg/L. Canada may follow suit.
[From *NGWA AGWSE Newsletter* September/October 2000]

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