

REPORT FROM WASHINGTON

by

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SOCIETY

Throughout the nation this week, concerned Americans of all ages and of widely differing social, political and economic philosophies are demonstrating their concern and commitment to the issue of the degradation of the environment. They are all talking about the question of survival, but the issue is more than survival itself, because survival is not enough. How we survive is the critical issue.

And our survival is wrapped up in the science of ecology, a big science that is concerned with all the ramifications of all the relationships of all living creatures to each other and their environment. It is a total consideration of the entire system, not just how we dispose of tin cans, bottles and sewage. It is concerned with the habitat of marine creatures, animals, birds and man. It is not only an environment of clean air and water and scenic beauty, but it is also a concern for the Appalachians and the ghettos where our citizens live in America's worst environment.

The real goal is an environment of decency, quality and mutual respect for all other human beings and all other living creatures--an environment without ugliness, without hunger, poverty or war. The goal is a decent environment in its broadest and deepest sense.

For too many years, we have had an indifferent attitude about the environment. The national goal was progress, and it was generally believed that this rich country had more than abundant resources to last for many years and that, if by some odd chance, the resources did eventually run out, science would surely find some way to solve the problem. And so business and industry and the consumer and government looked ahead to building a massive gross national product level and a soaring economy based on mass production to make every man a significant consumer.

The basic economic basis for making every man a consumer was founded on mass producing as cheaply as possible, and the mass production system worked. American technology proved it could succeed. It also proved successful in other ways. When the need was for an effective, efficient pesticide, the potent DDT and

other hydrocarbons were developed, and they worked well. When the call was for a detergent that made clothes whiter than white, new high phosphate and enzyme detergents were developed, and they worked well. When the call was issued for more oil, the best engineering skills punched holes into the ocean bottom and successfully pumped oil to the surface. When the need was more coal, faster and efficiently, massive shovels tore away the sides of hills with much more efficiency than the deep pit mines. When the desire was convenient, light weight, throw-away packaging, aluminum cans and plastics proved invaluable.

Everything worked well, but no one really paused to look beyond the basic efficiency. Pesticides worked, but they degraded slowly and also destroyed birds and fish; phosphates and enzymes worked, but they also added to the destruction of the nation's lakes and rivers; oil came up from the floor of the ocean, but it also spilled and threatened the fragile ecology of the seas; strip mining brought more coal much more efficiently, but it left ugly scars, added to erosion problems and polluted the waters; and plastics and aluminum cans proved effective and lightweight but added to the monumental waste disposal problems by being virtually indestructible.

This week, an estimated 2,000 colleges and universities, 10,000 high schools and 2,000 community groups are discussing these and the other complex dilemmas facing the quality of life. Now that attention has been focused on the problem, the tough fight to improve our environment must begin.

This is the time for old-fashioned political action. The time to demand that each political candidate from the county and city level to the United States Congress articulate their positions on environmental reform and preservation. Instead of electing men committed to building more highways and dams and supporting new weapons systems that will escalate the arms race, we need to be supporting men who will be committed to solving the environmental problems--domestically and internationally--that threaten the fabric of life.

We can preserve a clean and beautiful America if we have the will and desire to do so.