



# ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS SUMMARY

May 31, 1974

Office of Public Affairs

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Washington, D.C. 20460

## AIR

Kentucky Public Service Commission hearing on Louisville Gas & Elec. bid to install scrubbers on two more of its plants heard testimony from EPA's John Finklea on sulfur dioxide levels in Jefferson County (5 times over federal safety standards) causing estimated 100 deaths annually, which "clearly startled many persons at the hearing" (Louisville Courier-Journal, 5/14/74). In a major EPA effort to convince PSC to reconsider earlier ruling blocking scrubbers, EPA's Robert Baum stressed potential enforcement action for LG&E failure to meet '75 air standards, confidence in scrubbers expressed by EPA's Frank Princiotta (LG&E scrubbers...cleanest I have seen"), other state, local air, health officials (Journal, 5/14/74). Adverse reaction from Edison Electric Institute rep..."LG&E's brief experience insufficient...should consider alternatives, such as...higher smokestacks"...PSC Chairman Logan "bristling" to Baum: "What you are saying, although trying not to be obnoxious, is that EPA is going to take action against LG&E... unless we (PSC) allow the company to put on these scrubbers..." (Journal, 5/14/74). Story also covered in Louisville Times, 5/14/74. UMW's President Arnold Miller calls for scrubber approval in letter to PSC, to prevent "economic disaster" (Louisville Times, 5/16/74).

IN RELATED DEVELOPMENTS. Ralph Nader, in letter to N.Y. Times (5/21/74), counters American Electric Power System attack on scrubbers with EPA statistics (Jan. '74), which "...found FGD [flue gas desulfurization] technology ready for widespread use despite the reluctance of large utilities to research & develop this technology." Nader says "it is not necessary to weaken the Clean Air Act to accomodate intransigent utilities by imposing higher levels of air pollution on the breathing public... A true measure of physical comfort should include our successes in preserving and restoring the people's health." ....Environmental Technology & Economics (5/20/74) notes Bureau of Mines estimate that by mid-'75, when clean air standards take effect, "one-third of nation's coal supply will contain too much sulfur...", however, "use of stack-gas scrubbers will extend the amount of coal that can be used."

## VINYL CHLORIDE

The Washington Post (5/26/74) reports that data gathered from an EPA study of atmospheric concentrations of vinyl chloride along the Houston Ship Channel, where several chemical plants are located, is being withheld pending possible criminal prosecution, "would be released only after evaluation and possible legal disposition," according to EPA officials in Dallas. The Louisville Times (5/9/74) reports that B.F. Goodrich is aware that its plants release "small amounts" of vinyl-chloride gas into the air, but company claims "there is no danger... the gas is a volatile substance that dissipates rapidly...dispersed into the atmosphere in trace amounts only detectable by highly sophisticated instruments." EPA has begun monitoring both the air and water around Goodrich's Louisville plant, and found concentrations below the federal "maximum" standard of 50 ppm but which would be illegal if the Occupational Safety & Health Administration's proposed new regulation of "no detectable level" takes effect in July (Louisville Times, 5/9/74). While the Louisville Times (5/15/74), in calling for adoption of the new standards, admits

"enormous investments" will be necessary to maintain that level, "...it is certainly preferable to more angiosarcoma victims. The public must be prepared to pay the full price." The Louisville Courier-Journal (5/17/74) contends that industry's complaint of technological impossibility and severe economic disruption may be valid: "OSHA, the industry and the public must face [that] fact..." However, "industry...cannot be allowed...to postpone steps which will protect both its workers and persons who live near its plants... OSHA must continue to apply pressure. Human risk is an inescapable factor in most industrial processes, yet...must be minimized... No worker wants to be exposed to hazards on the job... neither do most workers want their jobs eliminated along with the hazards. ...Vinyl chloride...appears to present the biggest and most frightening challenge OSHA has encountered..."

IN RELATED DEVELOPMENTS. B.F. Goodrich has found "liver abnormalities" in several more of its Louisville employees, including some of its management and office personnel (Louisville Times, 5/17/74). ....Louisville Times (5/13/74) and AP story in Paducah, Ky. Sun-Democrat (5/14/74) discuss possible further evidence that Goodrich may have been aware vinyl chlorides relationship to cancer as much as a year before it released its information on the angiosarcoma victims. ....U.S. Dept. of Transportation reports vinyl chloride is an "explosive cargo" and is now studying to determine if "single large dose" could cause cancer in the event of a railroad accident (Bergen County Record, 5/20/74).

#### RESERVE MINING

Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis takes "under advisement" Reserve's appeal of April 20 decision by Judge Lord to close down the plant (Wash. Post, 5/16/74). Considered a "classic" among environmentalists and federal officials, case pits, says Russell Train, "...the public health issue against the economic one...[as] the basic underpinning for our environmental laws is the public health." (Wash. Post, 5/25/74). Reserve testified to its previous contention that "there had been no evidence of any immediate health hazard" (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 5/16/74) (see News Summary, 5/17/74), while federal, state attorneys rejected attempt by Court for compromise to keep Reserve open while switching to on-land disposal, citing immediacy of health hazard (Minn. Tribune, 5/16/74, Wash. Star, 5/16/74). Since effect of asbestos-fibers not evident for 15-20 years, health-hazard cannot be proved beyond "reasonable doubt," so "...how the appeals court rules," EPA officials say, "and what it says about the extent to which the government must prove a public health threat will affect the whole cleanup effort by the federal government and its allies" (Post, 5/25/74). Story also in Detroit News, 5/12/74; St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 5/13/74. Both Wash. Post (5/14/74) and Minn. Tribune (5/13/74) call for management responsibility to protect employees' "environmental rights...to be freed from the threat of economic blackmail so they may actively join in the uphill battle to restore and protect the environment (Tribune, 5/13/74). Tribune asks state legislature to "...look into questions raised by management that deliberately use potential job losses to sidetrack pollution controls." Post (5/14/74) says "the Silver Bay battle has become a textbook case of corporate intransigence...[Reserve] chose to delay and fight instead... The time is past when industries could make a mess...and freely walk away." D.J.R. Bruckner, in a syndicated column (L.A. Times, 5/8/74), asks government to "...use the law to force industry to use technology to protect life, [then] the value of technology will be obvious, and the economy will be healthy for much longer."

IN OTHER GREAT LAKES DEVELOPMENTS. Office of Management & Budget has released to EPA \$3.5 million for further evaluation, prevention & control of Great Lakes pollution, to be used under joint U.S.-Canada agreement made in 1972 (Clean Water Report, 5/10/74). ....N.Y. Times (5/24/74) reports that Canadian scientists have ruled phosphates, not carbon, key to eutrophication process, settling long-standing controversy. The scientists have asked the U.S. to ban most phosphate detergents from sewage in the Great Lakes area as soon as possible. ....Wall St. Journal (4/25/74) commends improved water

quality of the Detroit River and Lake Erie, and The Chicago Tribune (5/6/74) sees indication of improvement in Lake Michigan.

### OCEANS

Environmental Technology & Economics (5/20/74) reports that National Science Foundation-funded study finds "life proceeds at much slower rate at great ocean depths... [which] may have great significance in...proposals to dump garbage and other wastes on the deep ocean floor... They may simply accumulate." The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is being accused of sabotaging the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. Lewis Regenstein, exec. vice-pres. of the Fund for Animals writes in a Wash. Post column (5/23/74) that a South Carolina fur company is about to be issued a permit to import skins from seals slaughtered off South Africa, in direct opposition to the Act's prohibition on U.S. importation of any furs.....Henry Truby, pres. of the World Dolphin Foundation, notes another NMFS hearing in Seattle on proposed issuance of permits to allow commercial fishermen to kill dolphins, since the tuna industry has not figured out how to avoid catching them in their nets (Miami Herald, 5/16/74).

### BREEDER REACTORS

Under pressure from OMB and Calif. congressman Chet Holifield, EPA drops plans for cost/benefit analysis of breeder reactors (N.Y. Times, 5/21/74, Wash. Star, 5/21/74). The intended study was to have given EPA a broader base for critical evaluation of AEC's breeder reactor program, after calling AEC's impact statement on the program "inadequate" (see following story). Times noted that Mr. Holifield, a "long-time champion of nuclear power" having "considerable influence with the budget office" felt that EPA, "in their zeal to stop any form of generation of electricity, fossil or nuclear, to preserve pure air and pure water, is going beyond its mission." EPA said publication of proposed study was "an error," as the study was originally to have been used in EPA's evaluation of the impact statement. ....Citing incomplete, often improper assessment of reactor safety problems, plutonium disposal methods, cost-benefit ratios, EPA scores AEC's draft environmental impact statement on fast-breeder reactors as "inadequate." Based on demonstration project scheduled for '80 completion, and projected long-range 550-breeder-reactor network plan slated for full-scale operation by 2020, AEC concludes environmental impact of fast-breeder program "acceptably low," and economically beneficial (Wash. Post, 5/7/74). But, EPA feels "[the] draft statement does not support these conclusions because of omissions or deficiencies in the treatment of certain issues"--specifically, note Wash. Star (5/7/74), Bergen County (N.J.) Record (5/6/74), in the handling, storage of plutonium. EPA scores AEC for ignoring other technological alternatives, such as solar energy (N.Y. Times, 5/7/74; Christian Science Monitor, 5/15/74).

EDITORIAL REACTION: "Delay [in the program], however, is of no consequence, given the potential hazards involved. Unless it can be shown that the breeder reactor will be safe, there should be no breeder reactor program... The AEC still has not shown that there are adequate safeguards against the accidental release of long-lasting and deadly radioactive plutonium. Nor, says the EPA, has it shown that the costs of the program will be justified by the results...EPA wants better answers than the AEC has thus far given." (L.A. Times, 5/8/74). ....Washington Star-News (5/13/74): "The possibilities of disastrous power-plant accidents will be greater, as will the consequences of mishandling...great quantities of toxic, bomb-grade fuel. Mistakes of the kind that now keep so many nuclear plants closed down for repairs do nothing to assuage the safety fears of those who dread the arrival of the fast breeder...It will be necessary...to chalk up a much better operating record than has been established in the first few dozen plants.".....N.Y. Times (5/25/74) points out that "The fast breeder also creates a

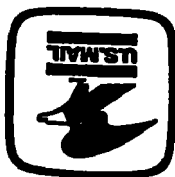
distinct possibility, for the first time, of construction of nuclear weapons...[reactor] is keyed to use of plutonium...[which] can be made directly into a bomb by one or two skilled persons." Scores AEC on failure to consider alternatives, especially solar energy; calls AEC statement "parochial, self-serving document."

IN RELATED DEVELOPMENTS. Wall St. Journal(5/13/74) calls for less emotional response to nuclear safety issues: "The overwhelming consensus of the scientific community is that nuclear plants are safe by any relative measurement. But critics have chosen to frame their objections in absolute terms, claiming any risk at all is intolerable... an effective emotional argument. It is conceivable that nuclear power is not the long-range answer to world energy consumption...but...nuclear power is the only...source that is technologically advanced enough at the present time."

IN OTHER NUCLEAR ENERGY DEVELOPMENTS. Chicago Tribune(5/13/74) says speed-up of nuclear plant licensing process is near, as Joint Atomic Energy Committee is expected to report out a bill soon which would, among other things, eliminate mandatory public hearing at the construction permit stage, bypass the application review by the Independent Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards, and authorize AEC to issue interim permits prior to hearings on operating licenses, if judged in the public interest..... International ecologist Barbara Ward calls "...plutonium bomb...very high price to pay for energy" in comments on nuclear power, warns against its "poison and lethally cancerous" properties, and asks that "environmental safeguards not be sacrificed to meet energy needs," in remarks at a meeting of the American Society of Planning Officials in Chicago (Chicago Sun-Times, 5/13/74).

#### LAND USE BILL

House Rules Committee votes out land use bill by 8-7 vote. Sponsored by Rep. Morris K. Udall of Arizona, bill would provide \$800-million to states over 8 years, with extensive federal guidelines for state planning, but is expected to be challenged on House floor by weaker version offered by two other Arizona Congressmen, John Rhodes and Sam Steiger, allowing \$40 million over 5 years with no guidelines. The Rhodes-Steiger version is currently supported by the Administration(N.Y. Times, 5/16/74; Wash. Post, 5/16/74).



EPA-335  
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
POSTAGE AND FEES PAID

Ofc of Public Affairs, A-107  
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460