



FEATURES

30 • Are We Burying Ourselves in Junk Mail?

It seems so simple to "Just Say No" to junk mail. Each of us receives 17 trees worth of unwanted mail each year, and together we add two million tons of it to our landfills and incinerators. But in our shop-at-home world, we rely on the stuff more than we realize.

By Will Nixon

34 • The Junk Mail Hall of Shame

Some catalog and letter mailers engage in outright mailbox abuse. They arrive too often, waste too much paper, use crass sales gimmicks and poison political debates. And many can't even be recycled.

By Will Nixon

38 • The Magazine Racket

Newsstands everywhere are stuffed fat with magazines—far more than ever sell. Even at good newsstands, half of the magazines may be garbage-on-arrival, yet publishers, magazine distributors and retailers all profit from the system.

By Diane Cyr

COVER: Photo by Elaine K. Osowski

E

THIS ISSUE

CONVERSATIONS

14 • Twenty Minutes With Carol Browner

The administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency talks about life in the Clinton administration, pesticide reform, hazardous waste incinerators, shrinking budgets, citizen activism and her five-year-old son's taste for bananas.

Interviewed by Will Nixon

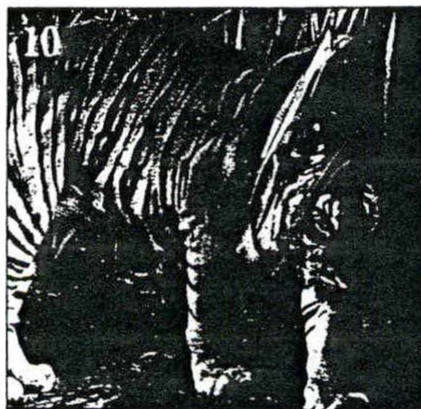
DEPARTMENTS

4 • E Word

6 • Advice and Dissent Letters From Our Readers

10 • In Brief

Toward Nuclear-Free Seas – Tigers on the Brink – The Green Wall of Russia – The Xerces Society – EarthTime Curriculum – Florida Bay Woes

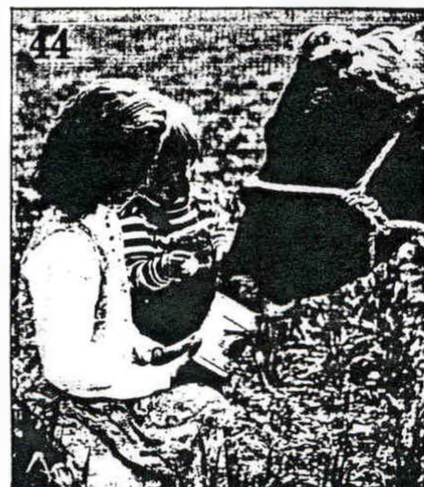


Section heading art by Randall Enos

18 • Currents

Fur Industry Fights to Survive – Kenaf: Paper of the Future? – Crisis Forces Conservation in Cuba – Eco-Architecture

44 • E Notes



48 • Food and Health

Meatless Meat Goes Mainstream
By Rosemarie Bria

51 • Environmentalist

Clean and Green Laundering
By Mark Harris

54 • Reviews

Rush Limbaugh and the Eco-Bashers
Reviewed By Will Nixon

56 • Holiday Green Marketplace

64 • The Earth Exchange

68 • Classifieds

72 • Latitudes

Good Science, Weird Reporting
By Andre Carothers

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A DVICE & DISSENT



Letters From Our Readers

How 'bout Life With Some Chlorine?

In "Sunset for Chlorine" (July/August 1993 cover story), David Moberg writes that polyvinyl chloride (PVC) or vinyl is "often easy to avoid" and advises: "Don't buy vinyl siding, gutters, window frames, pipe..." That's all very well for people who can afford expensive alternatives, but most cannot afford brick, natural wood siding, or copper pipes. And these natural materials also have negative environmental impacts. Bricks are energy-intensive to produce and transport and very labor-intensive to lay. And what of the copious amounts of cement needed in brick mortar? Terra cotta drain pipes are so plainly inferior—being heavy, fragile and difficult to joint—that it's hard to imagine their revival, short of draconian measures to ban PVC. Neither would environmentalists favor opening new clay pits to provide raw materials for more brick and terra cotta.

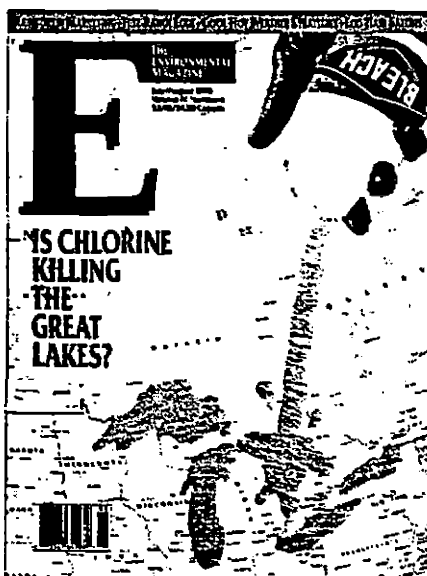
Moberg concedes in a moment of humor that a little sodium chloride is good for you. His anti-PVC strictures also deserve to be treated with a generous dash of salt.

Peter Samuel
Libertytown, MD

Toxic Controversies

Dr. Peter Montague's "Sign of the Times?" (*Forum*, July/August 1993) is filled with supposition and conspiracy theories that do your readers a disservice.

In *The Times* series last March, we reported that the nation is wasting enormous sums of money battling environmental problems that pose small risks to health and the environment, while leav-



ing much greater threats largely unaddressed. There is no more fundamental example of this than the billions we spend yearly digging up tons of slightly contaminated soil only to be burned, buried or treated someplace else. At some sites the work is urgent and the investment is worthwhile. But at most sites, is it necessary to spend \$10 to \$20 million an acre to "clean up" concentrations of toxic compounds that pose a risk so small it cannot be measured?

In reporting as he does, Montague meets the expectations of an environmental orthodoxy driven by the belief that more regulation is "good" environmentalism, and that questioning the value of regulation is "anti-environmental." By casting every chemical pollutant as a dire threat, Montague adds to the political rhetoric and popular belief on which the exorbitantly expensive waste management regulations have been built. The denser the web of rules, the happier the industry is, because the price of disposal goes up.

Near where I now live in northwestern Michigan, a Nevada company has proposed building a huge incinerator to burn garbage from the Midwest. That project is a direct result of regulations built on fear of groundwater contamination that has not been confirmed at most U.S. landfills. The regulations did almost nothing to reduce the amount of trash people

produced. They did, however, force the closure of existing city dumps and encouraged the construction of enormous landfills and incinerators in rural America, far from the source of the garbage. Building that incinerator here would be an insult to people who live in this beautiful area, and would permanently mar forests and farm fields now alive with flowers and wildlife.

One panel report last year found that toxic waste regulations hindered the development of old industrial sites in the state's impoverished urban centers. Employers were unwilling to pay millions of dollars to "clean up" sites with minute levels of toxic materials. Instead they built new plants on farm fields and in forests outside the cities. The result was spreading urban sprawl and an increase in air pollution from people driving to the new plants. In the meantime, inner cities crumble, along with the employment opportunities for men and women desperate for well-paid work.

I am following the trail of new evidence and new thinking about environmentalism wherever it leads. Dr. Montague is afraid of that. But *E Magazine* doesn't have to be.

Keith Schneider/National Correspondent
The New York Times

Dr. Peter Montague replies:

Mr. Schneider's letter and recent reporting serve one main purpose: to convince readers that industrial poisons are safe and don't deserve cleanup. In *Eco* magazine (June 1993), Schneider writes that the U.S. is wasting \$140 billion each year to capture chemicals that don't need to be captured because, "According to federal health studies, the incidence of cancer in most age groups has been steady over the past two decades." Schneider has his facts wrong: During the past 35 years, the incidence of all cancers has increased 42 percent.

Toxic chemicals buried in the ground are potentially harmful. In a 1977 study of groundwater contamination by landfills, conducted by leading geohydrologists Geraghty and Miller, groundwater



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Your Letters

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contamination by landfills was confirmed in 43 out of 50 cases (86 percent).

The National Research Council concluded in a book-length study in 1991 that "increased rates of birth defects, spontaneous abortions, neurological impairment and cancer have occurred in some residential populations exposed to hazardous wastes."

"Following the trail of new thinking ...?" Bunk. My guess is Schneider will soon get offers to manage "environmental communications" for some big chemical company.

Rethinking Rainforest Marketing

Diane Jukofsky's article, "Can Marketing Save the Rainforest?" (July/August 1993), did not address several key issues regarding the rainforest harvest. These include the ethics of the market, its impacts on rainforest peoples, and consumerism itself.

In November 1992, *Indian Unity*, one of the oldest newspapers in South America, reported: "The 'rainforest harvest'... is weakening the international campaign in support of our struggles for our rights. People think that by consuming some product they are guaranteeing our protection. Our communities' independence is also weakened as our well-being is made-dependent on western markets... selling products is meaningless if we ourselves do not control the marketing projects and the natural resources, if we ourselves do not control our lands."

Ever since studies proved that an intact rainforest is economically more valuable than a cleared one, scientists and would-be entrepreneurs have been making a bee-line for the forest, befriending indigenous peoples in the hopes of learning the secrets of the forest and coming home to create "green" products and medicines to sell to guilty and concerned North Americans and Europeans. And while many are well-intentioned, others have dollar signs in their eyes. For me, the bottom line centers around the questions asked by Stephen Corry of Survival International: "Are we only going to save those wildernesses which can pay their way? Are we really only going to stand up for the dispossessed if they start producing something we want?"

There is a fine line between sustainable extraction and exploitation. What if the bottom falls out and the market for Brazil nuts or oils no longer exists? Or if the demand for rainforest products far

exceeds the forest's ability to provide them sustainably? I doubt we'd say, "Sorry, we can't fill this demand." Historically, we've developed intensive and exploitative means to keep up with demand.

Finally, can we save anything by buying more? Consumerism is a major cause of ecosystem destruction. It makes no sense to feed this addiction in the name of "green business."

Susan Meeker-Lowry
Montpelier, VT

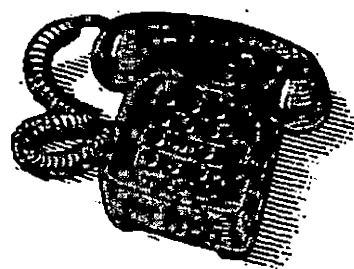
Cutting Clearcuts

Contrary to lumber industry propaganda, the problems of Northwest lumberjacks and mill workers ("Talking About Trees," *Currents*, July/August 1993) have been caused largely by lumber mismanagement. Given the loss of lumber jobs due to mechanized cutting, the wholesale export of raw logs and the tree decline caused by accelerated cutting, timbering will never again support generation upon generation of lumberjacks despite much desire and sentiment to the contrary. Sadly, many who call themselves lumberjacks might as well call themselves whalers or buffalo hunters. After all, free enterprise drove humpbacks and bison to the verge of extinction, too.

The solutions must include *greater* timber employment and *reduced* cutting pressure: First, ban clearcutting on public lands in favor of selective cutting determined by government foresters. This would make mechanized cutting impractical, employ more lumberjacks and be kinder to the environment. Second, ban the export of logs over five inches in diameter. This will force international timber buyers to purchase dimensional lumber, millwork and finished wood products, putting mills to work, bringing back jobs lost to foreign mills, and eventually improving our trade position due to the added value of manufactured goods. Third, phase in the use of recycled plastics for large-volume wood uses like garden timbers and marine pilings. This will reduce cutting, create a demand for recycled plastics and reduce exposure to chemical wood preservatives.

Lacking the perspective of distance, the situation in the Northwest has become a classical case of not being able to see the forest through the trees.

William T. Fidurski
Clark, NJ



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