The News and Observer, Raleigh, N. C., Tues., Sept. 28, 1982

PCB-tainted soil handled wrong, conservation group's leader says

By MICHAEL FLAGG
Staff Writer

The head of the National Wildlife Federation, the nation's largest conservation organization, said Monday that the PCB-contaminated soil being stored in a Warren County hazardous waste landfill should have been treated on the roadsides where it was illegally dumped.

"There is adequate technology to handle it in place," Dr. Jay D. Hair, a former professor of zoology at N.C. State University, said in an interview after a speech to about 150 Rotarians. "I would have fixed it in place."

Hundreds of demonstrators have rallied near the landfill in Afton attempting to stop trucks delivering the contaminated soil. State officials say the landfill is the cheapest and safest way to dispose of the soil, which was contaminated along roadsides in 14 counties in 1978.

"Unfortunately, the protests are getting a bit beyond the realm of the rational and on into the emotional," said Hair, executive vice president of the 4 million-member conservation group. "But it's obviously a very serious situation.

"I'm very concerned. It's gotten to be more a social issue than a scientific one."

The protesters claim their county was chosen for the landfill because it is largely poor, rural and black.

Hair told the Rotarians during a Civic Center luncheon that the Reagan administration's "new federalism," a policy of returning some federal powers to the states, "is a codeword for the disaster beginning to happen."

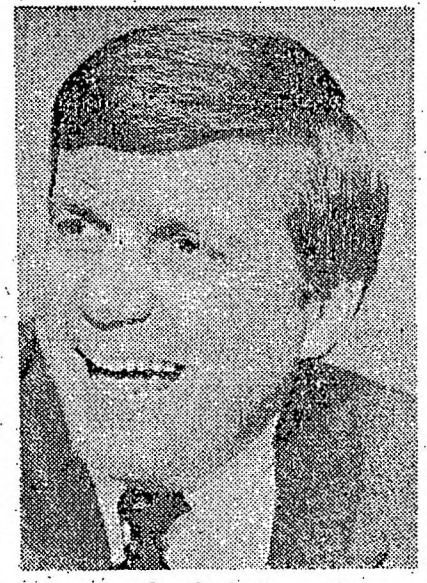
Reduced budgets for federal regulatory agencies dealing with the environment, particularly the Environmental Protection Agency, "severely compromise" efforts to check pollution and protect the environment, he said.

Attacks on environmentalists by Interior Secretary James G. Watt, whom Hair described as having a "bizarre and arrogant personality," have "enhanced the reputation" of the conservative environmental group, which has more registered Republicans than Democrats.

Hair, who maintains his residence in Cary and commutes to Washington, described North Carolina as "a paradise, but there's trouble in paradise."

Among the state's most pressing environmental problems, he said, are "the siltation and degradation of our highest-quality trout streams," pollution of coastal sounds, "the midnight dumping of PCBs," acid rain, the destruction of coastal wetlands and "the almost uncontrolled development of condominiums along our seacoast."

"We don't want North Carolina to develop creeping New Jersey-ism," he said. "Places like Bayonne, N.J. — they're not fit places for people to live."



Jay D. Hair
...'trouble in paradise'

PCB-ARCH-EXT0378514