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No Profits In Pollution

THE FAST-BUCK ARTISTS who deliberately pollute the environment because of a reckless aim of cutting business expenses should have gotten a sharp jolt this week when a federal judge fined Allied Chemical Corp. $13.3 million for dumping the highly toxic insecticide Kepone into Virginia's James River.

U.S. Dist. Judge Robert R. Merhige Jr. gave the maximum fine after the company pleaded no contest to 940 counts of knowingly discharging poison into the river. In words which should ring in every board room in the country, he said, "I hope, after this sentence, that every corporate employe who has any reason to believe that pollution is going on will say to himself, 'I'd better do something about this if I want to keep my company, if I want to keep my job.'" He found that the contamination of the river and Chesapeake Bay directly disabled 80 workers, denied livelihoods to scores of fishermen and caused untold harm to the public and wildlife.

The judge found that the pollution, which a U.S. attorney called the "greatest disaster of the environmental decade," was "done as a business necessity, to save money." If the judge was correct in his finding, it is outrageous that an American corporation, with annual sales of $2.5 billion, was so heinously irresponsible as to engage in such far-reaching pollution as company policy.

The judge's message is that questions of human health, livelihoods and wildlife damage cannot be set aside in the quest for profits. Those who do set them aside will pay dearly.

FORTUNATELY, NOT ALL corporations are so callous in their attitudes towards the environment as Allied appeared to be. Monsanto Chemical Co. won praise from the Environmental Protection Agency this week for its decision to voluntarily cease production of PCBs, an industrial chemical which EPA found to pose significant danger to both human health and the environment.

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