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U.S. Agency Urges a Drive to Bar Cancer by Screening Chemicals

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LOS ANGELES, Feb. 27—Prevention of cancer through a greatly expanded effort in screening chemicals for lethal properties was urged as a national priority today by the nation's top environmental agency.

The Council on Environmental Quality, a Federal agency that advises the President and Congress, chose the cancer problem for special emphasis as the subject of the opening 40-page chapter of its sixth annual report, released in Washington.

The council noted that cancer kills more than 1,000 people every day in the United States and that one out of four people are likely to contract it, and that from 60 to 90 percent of cancer is conjecturally attributed to environmental causes.

Compared with the amounts of human and financial resources invested in therapy, the investment in cancer prevention has been small," the council said.

The report added that of two million known chemicals, only 6,000 had been laboratory-tested for cancer-causing properties.

Ideas for Policy Seen

Fast, inexpensive testing methods currently under development are "the potential foundation for a national cancer-control effort that would prevent this crippling disease," the report said.

The recommendation came significantly as Congress, after a four-year legislative impasse, appears to be on the verge of enacting a law to regulate the circulation of toxic substances, to which large numbers of people are exposed. Research by the council soon after its formation in 1970 suggested a need for such legislation.

The council's report is the most authoritative annual assessment of the state of the environment, which went unmentioned in President Ford's State of the Union message in January.

The council was established under the terms of the National Environmental Policy Act. Its current members, appointed by the President, are Dr. Russell W. Peterson, John Busterud and Dr. Beatrice Willard. The council has a staff of 80, mostly professionals, and sponsors many studies by outside organizations.

The council, reporting the continuing abatement of air pollution by customary measurements, suggested that new and more sophisticated criteria were needed to assess the level of public health protection realistically.

Under the Clean Air Act of 1970, pollution is measured by the weight of six basic contaminants — particulates, sulfur oxides, carbon monoxide, photochemical oxidants, nitrogen oxides and hydrocarbons.

This yardstick, the council said, fails to distinguish between relatively harmless large particles and small ones that can enter and harm human lungs; and provides no gauge of toxic substances such as acid sulfates, nitrates, trace metals and organic compounds.

Other highlights of the report included the following:

¶Over the 1974-83 decade, Governmental, industrial and citizen expenditures for federally mandated pollution controls will total $217.7 billion, up 11.7 percent from last year's calculation of $194.8 billion for the 1973-82 decade.

¶The average American family is now spending about 1 percent of its income on federally mandated controls, and this will double during the next decade.

¶Industry's prospective annual outlays for water pollution control alone will go up about 70 percent as the 1977 and 1983 deadlines for compliance with Federal standards draw nearer.

¶Despite extensive air pollution abatement, only 91 of the nation's 247 air quality control regions met the statutory mid-1975 deadline for compliance with Federal standards, and the full effects of variances granted some industrial establishments to burn high-sulfur coal and oil "are still uncertain."

¶"The worst point sources of water pollution are now being effectively controlled and some of our most heavily polluted waterways are being cleaned up. Nutrients, trace metals and land runoff are going to prove difficult and pollutant challenges."

The ban on DDT has brought "significantly lower levels" of *the pesticide in wildlife and human* food supplies and "a more gradual decline" in residues in human beings.

Ambiguous measurements of mercury in the environment since stringent discharge controls were instituted "underscore the need for careful monitoring."

Polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) residue levels have dropped in most foodstuffs but not in "some environmental systems and wildlife," and further restrictions in the already-halved production of PCB (used mainly in industrial equipment) "may be necessary."

Industry's Speed Deplored

"Some observed cancer undoubtedly arises from natural sources like radiation and asbestos, but much of the remainder is probably associated with carcinogenic agents produced by man," the report said.

"Unfortunately, industry's capacity to develop new chemical substances far exceeds the ability of medical and scientific investigators to determine the carcinogenic potential. Because of the typical latency period of 15-40 years for cancer, we must assume that much of the cancer from recent industrial development is not yet observable."

Without presenting any specific program, the council said the cancer-prevention effort should involve "basic research, population studies, animal tests and the elimination or reduction of unwarranted carcinogenic exposures."

In 1973, economists for the council calculated, federally mandated pollution controls were costing the nation about $47 a citizen—1.1 percent of median family income. This amount will more than double in the next decade, it was stated, and will average out to about $100 a year.

Of the prospective $217.7 billion 10-year national expenditure in pollution control, $143.7 billion would be for air pollution, $68.1 billion for water pollution, $5.7 billion for solid waste management, and $300 million for atomic power plant radiation shielding to meet Federal standards.

These estimates customarily are made on a 10-year basis because expenditures seldom can be isolated in a single 12-month period.

Of the $217.7 billion total $31.9 billion is estimated as expenditures by Federal, state and local governments; $70.7 billion direct expenditures by citizens (principally for automobile smog control equipment), and $113.1 billion by industry.

The industry portion averages out to $11.3 billion a year, less than 10 percent of industry's recent annual outlays for plant expansion.

Industry's power pollution expenditures for the 1974-83 decade were projected at $66.4 billion compared with $28.8 billion for the 1973-82 decade. The Federal water pollution law calls for industrial establishments to install "best practicable" treatment facilities for fluid wastes by 1977, and "best available" by 1983.

"Pollution control expenditures are not expected to impede substantially industry's plans to expand or modernize, nor to affect labor productivity adversely," the council said.

"Environmental programs are frequently accused of being a major cause of unemployment," the report continued. "However, all the analyses seem to indicate that they have on balance probably increased, not decreased the number of available jobs."

The report cited Labor Department data that since 1972 there had been only 75 plant closings throughout the country in which federally require pollution control costs were a factor, involving only about 13,000 jobs. Conversely the current Federal $18 billion municipal sewage improvement grant program is estimated to be producing 80,000 to 85,000 jobs for each billion dollars.

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