

October 2, 1970

Philip S. Rummerfield, Sc.D.
12980 Via Esperia
Del Mar, California 92014

Dear Rummerfield:

I am not at all surprised that you have been disturbed by the opinions bandied around, at present, with much greater vigor than erudition, about many things in relation to environmental threats of one kind and another. I am not astonished either that you should think that I have both the time and inclination to answer, in writing to individuals, the questions raised and, more particularly, the statements made by astonishingly self-assured people. It so happens, however, that I am up to my neck in work concerned with the presentation of facts, and if I make any effort at all to answer such lengthy criticisms of me and my thinking as the latest paper which you sent, I shall be wasting the time which must be spent at profitable work, if the latter is to be done within the scanty residuum of my life time. Why, may I ask, should I, after forty odd years of intensive work and observation (and familiarity with what has been written and said), reply to some half-baked anonymous novice who has not even understood (or tried to understand) what I have said, and who does not even recognize that Dr. Patterson is a good geochemist, but a babe in arms in biology and particularly in the snares of medical diagnosis and interpretation. Your correspondent is once removed from even the position of Patterson.

What has happened in the biologically and ecologically difficult field of environmental health, is that the amateurs in government (and elsewhere) have invited the emotional support of everyone without regard to the facts and potential consequences, in order to obtain popular judgments in political support of measures of control. The result in that, in the absence of completely valid facts, the entire matter has become one of political pressure for reform based upon fear, without the information which would implement reform and make it meaningful. I'm afraid there is no help at hand to put order into the chaos which now exists, when almost everyone is participating "in the act."

I agree with you, that the professionals in the health fields will have to make themselves heard and felt in the present situation. This, however, will not be the case if they spend very much of their time in arguing with individuals. It is to be remembered that Louis Pasteur wasted an enormous amount of his very valuable time and energy in participating vigorously for years in bitter controversy and polemical discussions. (Read his biography by Jean Valery Radot.) The point is that the discussion must be held with the right people at the right time. This, in this instance, means the presentation of the evidence, and as much of the truth as can be drawn therefrom, to the governmental authorities (and to the people who talk directly to them) at the time that action (legislation and regulative measures) is under immediate consideration. This I have done and will continue to do whenever the opportunity presents itself.

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I suggest that you write such answer as you can - if you have time - to the notes sent to me, through Dr. Johnson. Believe me, this suggestion does not come out of my willingness to side step responsibility, nor should it be regarded as a left-handed criticism of yourself. It is merely the best advice I can offer to you at present. Thanks for writing me as you have done.

Cordially yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.
Professor Emeritus of
Occupational Medicine

RAK:wb