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Editorial

Two Voices Against Polluting The Sea

THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA, says Jacques Cousteau, is so contaminated from wastes from countries of Europe and Africa that it is on the point of harboring only viruses and bacteria — elements that will kill people on its coastal areas unless they move far inland.

The description of impending disaster for the Mediterranean from this experienced oceanographer was frightening. It adds weight to his previous warnings that all of our seas and oceans are being abused by man to the point of real danger, and he long has pleaded for the nations to join hands to combat the pollution.

It is coincidental that his statements at the United Nations followed closely a related warning by a Floridan at an environmental conference in Chicago.

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NATHANIEL P. REED, the man President Ford should have named to be Secretary of Interior instead of making a political appointment, was the speaker. He is now Assistant Secretary in charge of the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and long has shown his concern for the environment.

Floridan Reed's speech was on the danger to mankind from polychlorinated biphenyls, known as PCBs. As the name suggests, the substance is a much chlorinated compound of a coal tar derivative, and is used in industry throughout the World for its resistance to heat. Sports Illustrated magazine recently traced the use in an article, cataloguing PCBs' dangers and quoting Nat Reed.

Reed's audience included scientists, businessmen, conservationists and government officials, and he told them: "The problem is a national problem. I am deeply shocked by the pervasiveness of PCBs; they are literally everywhere. I am very troubled by the exceedingly high levels found in fish in all our drainage systems, and I do not mean just the Hudson and the entire Great Lakes system, but the Merrimac and Connecticut rivers of the Atlantic Coast, the Mississippi and Ohio rivers of the Midwest, the Columbia River system in the Northwest, the Sacramento in the West, the Rio Grande and other Gulf Coast streams . . ."

He also could have added the St. Johns River that flows past Volusia County's western boundary and the Apalachicola River in the Florida Panhandle. These, says Sports Illustrated, also harbor the deadly compound.

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PCBs GET INTO the streams from the manufacture annually of 100 million capacitors and transformers used in electrical distribution and in airconditioning systems. One manufacturer in New York State last Summer was charged by the state's environmental protection agency of discharging at least 30 pounds of PCBs into the Hudson River each day. The company is fighting an order to reduce the discharge to two pounds a day by year's end and to zero by next September. While the fight goes on, the public has been warned against eating fish from the river and from Lake Ontario.

There is also the danger from junked equipment containing PCBs; the substance leaches through the soil into streams. Then there are accidents. Last year, the Department of Defense was preparing to ship a transformer to an Air Force station in Alaska, and it fell on a pier in Seattle, dumping 265 gallons of PCBs into the Duwamish River. Defense pleaded innocence, the U.S. Coast Guard said the matter was out of its jurisdiction, so the contamination spread until the Environmental Protection Agency assumed the cost of the massive cleanup job that still goes on.

REED CALLED for the elimination of all sources of PCBs within three years. He blasted the Food and Drug Administration for its settling for a "tolerance" level of five parts per million of PCBs in fish that people eat, a level that flies in the face of scientific findings that a lesser amount has caused cancer or malformation in test animals.

"I am thoroughly disgusted by the gnashing of teeth, wailing and rubbing of hands," Reed said. "To the agencies which have the enforcement responsibilities, a word on behalf of the bewildered but concerned American people — get on with it!"

Reed is akin to Cousteau in concern about what man is doing to his environment. Just as the U.N. should be paying less attention to World politics and more to the state of the globe's environment, the Ford Administration should be less concerned about its fate next year and pay more heed to the danger accruing for the next generation through neglect. — M.N.C.

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