

# Vermont Environmental Report

## Environmental Regulations: The New Scapegoat

by Rose Houk

In his urge to stomp out the wildfire of inflation, President Carter has established a Regulatory Council. Its mission: to determine the cumulative impact of federal regulations on the economy. The new Council, which includes representatives from all executive departments and agencies with major regulatory responsibility, has been directed to publish a calendar of major regulations at least twice a year. The first calendar, published in February, states the goals, benefits, legal requirements, timetables, and estimates of the economic effects of the Federal government regulations.

Environmental regulations, from the amount of benzene exposure workers receive to the number of pages in an environmental impact statement, will be subject to this new panel's scrutiny. The Council's first chairman, Douglas Costle, Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, assured attendees at a National Wildlife Federation conference in December that, "Nobody's going to march through Washington like Sherman and start waving aside environmental regulations." Costle warned, however, that "we're going to have to get in and scramble" because of the growing pressure for regulatory reform.

While the rate of inflation and its effects are undeniably of unprecedented magnitude, and while it is sensible to make the regulatory process more responsive, many people question the assumption that environmental regulations are often major reasons for our economic woes.

Gus Speth, a member of the President's Council on Environmental Quality, said he has serious reservations about the proposals of some business leaders and others

that health, pollution, and resource development controls should be cut back in the crusade against inflation. Speth cited a Chase Econometrics study to back his thesis. Using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as a gauge, the Chase study indicated that between 1970-1983 federal pollution control requirements would push up the index 0.3 to 0.4 percent each year, on the average. It would take a substantial relaxation of 20 percent, before the CPI would be cooled by even 0.1 percent, Speth noted.

In Speth's view, the benefits of environmental regulations are not always reflected in this index or the other traditional yardstick of the economy's health, the Gross National Product. Environmental regulations are designed to bring in the hidden, social costs of production—which economists refer to as "externalities"—the destruction of scarce resources, increased illness and disease, and others. Occasionally it takes an environmental disaster like the Amoco Cadiz oil spill or the Kepone horror in Hopewell, Virginia, to highlight the true costs of avoiding adequate control, Speth asserted.

Each side, however, seems to have its high-powered studies to bolster its arguments. The U. S. Chamber of Commerce expressed its concern that federally-mandated environmental controls are exerting adverse effects on the overall economy. Harold H. Short, chairman of the Chamber Environment Committee, cited a Brookings Institute study which reported that environmental expenditures have reduced the growth rate of the Gross National Product by 20 to 25 percent

**Continued...**

## The tripling of world economic output since mid-century has raised the pressure on biological systems, often to an unsustainable level.

since 1967. In addition, Short refuted claims that the pollution control industry has produced a net gain for the economy. While acknowledging that many new jobs have resulted from that industry's growth, he questioned how many other jobs were not created because companies were "forced" to divert investments into pollution abatement equipment.

While obviously concerned about the seriousness of inflation, Americans have not relinquished support for environmental protection. This is the major conclusion of a nationwide opinion poll conducted by Resources for the Future staff member Robert Cameron Mitchell. More than a thousand people were randomly selected and interviewed in July, 1978 just weeks after Californians passed Proposition 13.

According to Mitchell, "The results of the survey are striking. Although the respondents are deeply concerned about inflation and taxes, their support for environmental protection is strong and unwavering, and their sympathy with the environmental movement is at a high level, with no sign of backlash."

In fact, the Resources for the Future Study, convincingly dispels the belief that public support for environmental programs will automatically weaken in the face

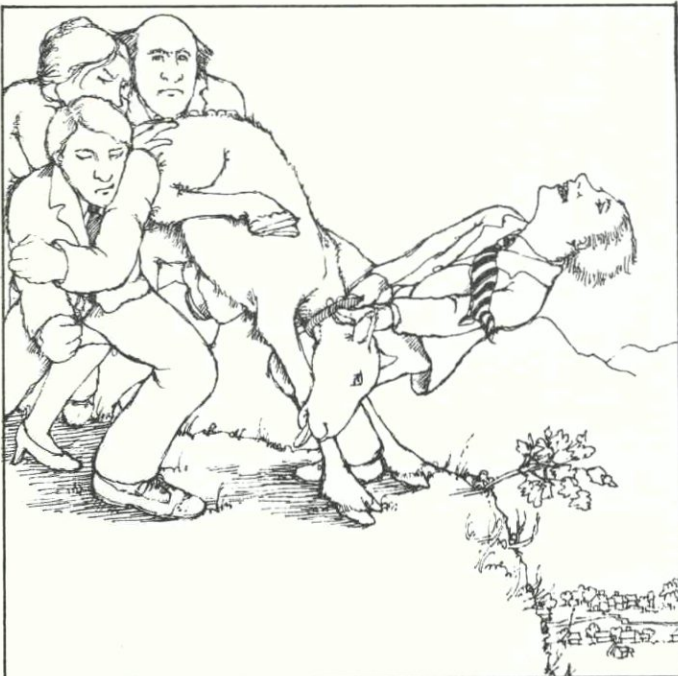
of competing pocketbook issues such as the costs of pollution control, the energy crisis, inflation or taxes. When posed with the trade-off between higher prices to protect the environment, and lower prices but more pollution, the public chose the environmental protection option by more than *three to one*. Another RFF trade-off question produced an equally dramatic result: the majority said that "Protecting the environment is so important that requirements and standards cannot be too high, and continuing improvements must be made regardless of cost." Only 10% agreed with an alternative position that "pollution control requirements and standards have gone too far; it already costs more than it is worth."

Those who would prefer to erode the progress that has been made in environmental protections should heed these public perceptions. Several economists are suggesting that the perplexing spiral in costs that grips the industrial world may be partly explained by resource deterioration.

Where traditional economic theory fails to provide an answer, Lester Brown of Worldwatch Institute steps in with a resource-based explanation. Writes Brown in *The Twenty-Ninth Day*, "The tripling of world economic output since mid-century has raised the pressures on biological systems, often to an unsustainable level. In more and more situations, rapidly expanding human claims are surpassing the carrying capacity of biological systems. The result is rising prices for seafood, lumber, leather, firewood, soybeans and scores of other commodities of biological origin." Overgrazing, overcutting, and overfishing have all led to increased costs of the resources upon which these activities depend. Intensive fertilization and cultivation of marginal farmland cannot offset the losses of cropland to highways, cities and erosion.

"Unless economists can gain a better understanding of the relationship between biological carrying capacities and inflationary pressures, they will be hard pressed to advise political leaders wisely. They may end up treating the symptoms rather than its causes," Brown concludes.◇

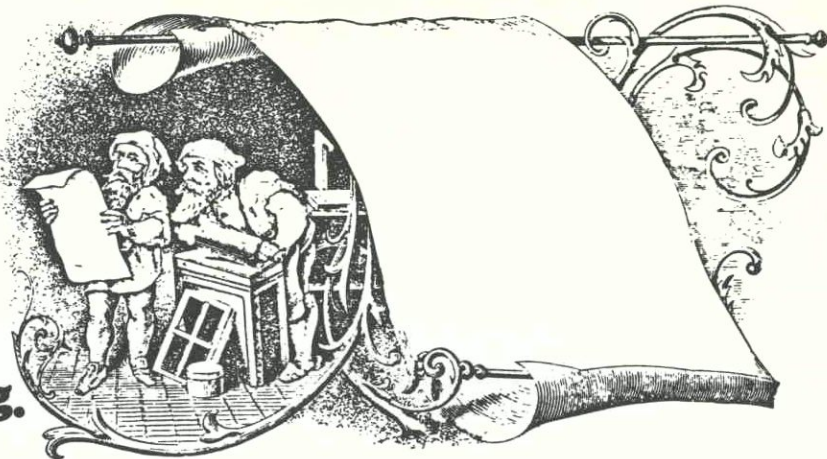
Rose Houk is the editor of *Conservation News*, National Wildlife Federation publication.



The resisting goat . . .

Drawing by Barbara Carter

**Dear Reader:  
We're pondering.**



We are thinking about making some major changes in the **Vermont Environmental Report** over the next few months. But before we go too far in our renovations, we would like to know what you are thinking.

The questionnaire below is an attempt to do this. Please take a few minutes to respond to the questions . . . your answers will help us make up our minds.

Thank you.

Sincerely,  
*Rebecca Davison*  
Rebecca Davison  
Editor

P.S. To make the task a little easier, we've made the questionnaire into a self-mailer. Just fold it so VNRC's address is visible and put it in the mail.

- 
1. How long have you been a VNRC member? \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Do you feel that receiving the VER is an important part of your membership? Yes  No
  3. Do you read the VER each month? Yes  No 
    - Every word
    - Half of each issue
    - Only the headlines

4. In general, how does the VER:

Read?

Look?

**Reinventing the VER. . . . .**

1. The plight of young farmers in Vermont, the consequences of the 1977 Clean Air Act, the Appalachian Trail versus private land, the Pyramid Mall struggle, the endangered existence of the African elephant, these are examples of stories that have appeared in the VER over the last year. We want to continue to report on the major issues, and we will continue to seek out the best sources of information on those issues. But we also want to know what your interests are.

The following list will help us focus the VER and help us bring you the information you want. Please check the items below that are of interest to you.

- land use: forests, farms, factories . . .
- pollution: beer cans, 2,4,5,-T, chemical wastes, smog . . .
- wildlife: the deer herd, whooping cranes, hunting and fishing . . .
- natural areas: wilderness, the Long Trail, wetlands . . .
- health: drinking water, asbestos fibers, radiation levels . . .
- energy: wood, nuclear, solar . . .
- transportation: car pools, the Concorde, Amtrak, highways . . .
- state and federal programs: water quality, endangered species, pork barrel water projects. . .
- programs of other organizations: the Lake Champlain Islands Trust, the ELF program. . .
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. A - Are there particular points of view you would like to see in the VER:

- scientific
- legal
- social
- economic
- other \_\_\_\_\_

B - What geographical areas would you like the VER to cover:

- regional
- national
- international
- other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Complaints, praise, people you'd like to see interviewed, editorial opinion you'd like to see expressed, issues you feel should be covered -- if you have any other comments concerning the VER, please use the space below.

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Vermont Natural Resources Council  
26 State Street  
Montpelier, Vermont 05602

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**Montpelier, Vermont 05602**

## Open Letter from Mark Lapping

Dear VNRC member:

I feel like the classical harpsicordist on the bill directly following the smash rock group performing at the local high school. VNRC and its membership owe Dave Marvin a great deal. His act will be hard to follow. Dave's leadership as Chairman of the Board helped shape us into one of the foremost groups of its kind within New England. His managerial skills, sense of direction and attention to detail have put us on a solid financial footing. Although we are still not "out of the woods" totally, our funding situation is substantially better than it has been in the past. Dave's tenure has been a significant one and we are lucky that his counsel, experience and commitment to VNRC and Vermont will remain as a reservoir from which we can continue to draw.

We have also been fortunate to have had as members of the Board Tony Adams and Hugo Meyer, who have consistently been supporters, advocates and workers for VNRC. Here again there is talent we will be able to call upon in the future for our needs and purposes. Finally, I want to thank Nat Frothingham, a past staff member, for his energy, wit and wisdom. We have profited immensely from the service and commitment of these individuals and the membership of VNRC owes them much.

Clearly, it is one of my priorities to see that the solvency VNRC now enjoys will remain with us. We simply cannot continue to be a force and voice for constructive environmental policy, legislation, education, and action without the continuing support of our present membership and the active recruitment of new members.

As I travel in Vermont, I have the feeling that far too many people have been lulled into a sense of security about environmental issues and problems. Many people tend to feel that with laws like Act 250 and the bottle ban all is well and safe. This security is an illusion. Perhaps as never before a set of problems, loaded with trade-offs of a generally unattractive nature, exist for us.

The loss of prime agricultural land is one such trade-off. Vermont has been consistently losing prime farmland--and with it we are losing a basic part of our working, rural culture. We need to address this issue. We need to find ways of working with agricultural groups, agencies, and farmers to make farming more economically viable, and to retain our agricultural resource. Yet, the preservation of farming in Vermont will cost money. And the question then becomes one of who will pay? I am convinced that the burden can no longer be carried solely by the agricultural community.

Our energy situation is also fraught with trade-offs. We find ourselves dependent on sources of energy that are not necessarily susceptible to manipulation by Vermonters. We are exceedingly vulnerable in this regard, a sense of powerlessness permeates all discussions on this critical topic. We are faced with difficult questions. Questions like: How much are we going to compromise the air we breathe in order to satisfy our increasing demand for more energy? Where should our energy priorities be?

The challenges we face will not necessarily be met by enacting new laws or changing old ones. Rather, we are witnessing something of a test of confidence, a crisis of spirit. We must truly believe that our use of natural resources has limits, many of them are finite, and that a sound socio-economic environment is as important as a healthy, abundant, natural one. We must believe that we can have both economic opportunities and environmental quality by creating new programs that work, discarding those that don't, and encouraging a high level of volunteerism.

The decisions will be difficult, the sacrifices even more so, but to compromise the goal now is to compromise the future.

Sincerely,

*Mark Lapping*  
Mark Lapping  
Chairman

*Mark Lapping, Acting Director of Environmental Studies at the University of Vermont, is the new Chairman of the Board for VNRC.*

## EPA Bans Herbicides: 2,4,5-T and Silvex

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency has temporarily halted the major uses of the herbicides 2,4,5-T and Silvex, a similar product used for weed control.

Recent studies have shown a high miscarriage rate among women of Alsea, Oregon immediately following the spraying of 2,4,5-T in forests there. Numerous laboratory tests in several animal species reveal similar reproductive problems with the herbicide. Silvex, which is similar in composition to 2,4,5-T, was suspended to prevent similar exposure, since Silvex could be used as an alternative.

The Agency's "emergency suspension" action was taken because the spring spraying season is only a few weeks away.

The suspension applies to approximately 25 tons of 2,4,5-T about to be used in New England to control weeds on power line right-of-ways, as well as in pastures and forests. The suspension also applies to Silvex, a weed killer used mostly on lawns and for aquatic weed control. However, 2,4,5-T will continue to be used on rice and rangeland in southern and western states, where there is little human exposure.

William R. Adams, Jr., EPA Regional Administrator, said, "The emergency suspension action EPA has taken will protect nearly four million persons nationally who

may have been unknowingly or involuntarily exposed to these herbicides as a result of the forestry, right-of-ways, and pasture uses. The potential for significant human exposure, the warning signals from the Alsea study, and the strong animal test data compel this action."

Consumers and distributors are reminded that the sale, distribution, or use of a suspended herbicide/pesticide is illegal and may be punished by substantial fines. Consumers concerned as to whether their spring gardening products contain Silvex should check the active ingredients label. It is listed either as Silvex or 2,4,5-Trichlorophenoxy Propionic Acid and 2,4,5-T is listed as 2,4,5-Trichlorophenoxyacetic Acid.

EPA has already issued "Stop Sale, Use, and Removal Orders" to hundreds of producers, distributors, and large scale users of the herbicides. Consumers are urged to report violations of the suspension orders to EPA's Pesticide Branch, 19th floor, JFK Federal Building, Boston, Massachusetts 02203, or telephone 617/223-5126. When reporting violations please note the brand name of the product, the EPA registration number (usually found along the bottom of the product label), and the name and mailing address of the user or the store where purchased.◇

# VNRC

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Address Correction Requested

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