



# President's

## COLUMN

The Federal Clean Air Act is 'up for re-authorization, hearings are being held, and the fight is on.

During the campaign, Ronald Reagan was quoted as saying, "The battle for clean air has been substantially won" on the same day he had trouble landing in Los Angeles because of a serious smog problem. He received considerable press notice over his utterance that eighty percent of pollution comes from plants and trees. With this type of environmental health support coming from the White House, those valuing a breath of fresh air have their jobs cut out for them.

Air pollution poses documented health problems, but we still do not know all the adverse health effects of various pollutants and combinations of pollutants. However, it would be ridiculous to wait another 30 years for further epidemiological evidence as was done for smoking. Additionally, air pollution creates economic perils for vast areas of our nation relying on agriculture, tourism, and recreation. Pollution costs the public in terms of absenteeism, health care, insurance rates, and Medicaid expenditures as well as in corroded materials, maintenance, laundry bills, property damage, animal and plant life, and sterile lakes from acid rain. These costs may be hidden and difficult to calculate, but are nonetheless real.

The epidemiology of air pollution is in its infancy. Photochemical smog was first described some 30 years ago. Historically, we find that standards become more stringent as knowledge is enhanced.

Acid rain and the resultant damage to lakes, particularly in the northeastern United States and eastern Canada, is not only serious and possibly irreversible, but is a matter of national shame. The continuing problem is due to lack of political will rather than lack of technology. Canada has been unbelievably patient and long-suffering. Perhaps. President Reagan feels about lakes as he does about trees..."when you've seen one tree you've seen them all."

It is of serious concern that some members of our species seem more willing to suffer the health, social, economic, and environmental consequences of disease and pollution than to pay for a healthy environment for this and future generations.

The Report of the National Commission on Air Quality indicates that improved air quality has brought benefits worth from \$4.6 billion to \$51.2 billion each year, while costs of installing, maintaining, and operating pollution equipment are estimated to have been \$16.6 billion in 1978. The Report also notes that air pollution controls have added only about 0.2 percent to the annual inflation rate. The report further states that such costs "have had only insignificant effects on national indicators such as the Consumer Price Index, Gross National Product, and unemployment rate." The Study also indicates that the limited effects on economic indicators would be even smaller if the benefits of control are considered, and that "some studies show that the economic benefits may even equal or exceed costs that have been borne by the Nation's consumers." Another recent study (Bartlit) shows that an \$82 million annual cost of pollution control expenditures on a large coal-fired power plant represented an increase of a mere 5 to 60 cents on a \$100 electricity bill for the consumer.

Perhaps we've been too complacent about assertively protecting our environment and our health from environmental pollution. For years, we knew that former Senator Edmund Muskie would look after our interests. Thankfully, we have another champion of environmental protection from New England. Senator Robert Stafford, (R-VT), chairs the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. The Committee has been receiving comprehensive, detailed, expensive reports recommending weakening the Clean Air Act for powerful well-financed polluter interests.

APHA cannot compete with such expensive studies, so our members must individually write, telegram, or mailgram Senator Stafford recommending that the Clean Air Act not be weakened. He and other members of the Committee will appreciate hearing from you. Don't leave it to the other person. He and his staff members have told us they're not hearing from you. Contact Senator Robert Stafford, Chairman, Committee on Environment and Public Works, Washington, D.C. 20510, today!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Larry J. Gordon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent initial "L".