

EPA in Transition

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GUEST EDITORIAL

All of the programs of the EPA as well as all of the programs of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration are, in fact, health programs. All have health goals and, at a minimum, must protect the health of our citizens. The American Public Health Association supported the creation of the EPA during President Nixon's tenure, and I was privileged at that time to represent the Association and provide testimony before the President's Committee on Executive Reorganization. We have continued to support EPA and its various public health program and have worked hard to ensure adoption of a wide range of statutes designed to protect the environment and the health of our citizens within that environment. The APHA, through various policy statements and subsequent actions, has supported such measures throughout its 108-year history, and will continue to in the future.

It has been understandable and expected that powerful interests affected by the actions of EPA, mandated by the American citizens through the United States Congress, would attempt to create a backlash and turn public opinion against these essential public health measures. Such efforts have not been successful. National opinion polls have continued to indicate that the majority of American citizens continue to support environmental protection efforts and measures even though they know that there is some cost connected with such measures. The costs, however, have also been blown out of proportion by affected polluting interests. The studies have indicated that the effect on the economy and on inflation has actually been insignificant, while at the same time environmental protection measures have also created new jobs, new industries, and, in many cases, substantial new tax revenues for state and local governments.

At the local level, voters throughout the United States went to the polls on November 4th and overwhelmingly indicated their desire for bond issues to provide new environmental protection facilities (primarily water pollution and waste facilities). Certainly, as evidenced by polls and votes, the majority of the American public continues

to favor and understand the necessity of environmental protection measures for this and future generations. There has been no indication that, aside from the corporate will of large polluting interests, the American public will stand for turning back the clock and repealing the existing environmental protection measures designed to protect the health of all of us.

We recommend that key appointees in the EPA in the future be appropriately trained and experienced environmental scientists, well versed in the basic health sciences such as epidemiology and biostatistics. Many of the key EPA personnel in the past have not had such knowledge and experience, and this has been indicated by some of the actions and attitudes of the EPA. Health-effects research regarding environmental contaminants and pollutants needs to be reexamined, redirected, and improved.

The record of EPA since its original authorization and creation has been dismal with regard to its relationships with its counterpart state and local environmental health and environmental protection agencies. Key personnel of EPA have been inaccessible to such state agency leaders and in many cases have evidenced the attitude of working "on" the states rather than working "with" state and local governments in pursuit of their mutual goals and desires to enhance the environment and protect human health. Certainly, more input, coordination, and cooperation are necessary in this area, and would seem to be in line with the policy which President Reagan has enunciated.

On a few specific issues, the APHA continues to have serious concern and apprehension about such problems as acid rain, hazardous wastes, toxic chemicals, and the health and economic problems associated with the entire nuclear fuel cycle. I have favored, and continue to favor, the same type of commitment to solar energy as the nation undertook to put a man on the moon.

Additionally, the APHA knows that the battle for clean air, clean water, and good solid waste management has not been won, but a few essential protective measures are in place. We are vitally concerned that the Clean Air Act not be weakened when reviewed by Congress this year. We are specifically concerned that there be no weakening of the "no significant deterioration" provisions of the Clean Air Act.