

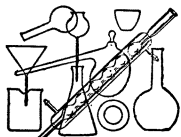
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ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

Getting it all together

If any generalization can be made about the myriad Federal pollution control agencies that exist in several departments, it is that they do not do a very good job.

There are exceptions. The enforcement branch of the Interior Department's Federal Water Quality Administration under Murray Stein is vigorous and effective; the Bureau of Water Hygiene of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare this year came out with a report that frankly and honestly questioned the quality of the nation's municipal water treatment plants (SN: 6/27, p. 614). And there have been signs of improvement. Interior Secretary Walter Hickel, for example, has begun to convince some of the more zealously antipollution staffers in Interior that he means business.

But too often the rule has been bureaucratic inefficiency, coziness with polluters and lack of scientific expertise. FWQA eutrophication researchers sometimes sound as though they work for the detergent industry, and U.S. Department of Agriculture officials, hauled into court by the Environmental Defense Fund and others who want a total ban on DDT, appeared to do a good imitation of chemical company executives.

Just as serious, some glaring omissions in pollution monitoring have become evident in the past year. The National Air Pollution Control Administration, it turns out, missed a number of trace elements in urban air sampling that University of Maryland researchers picked up (SN: 5/30, p. 538); FWQA learned about the now notorious extent of mercury pollution only after Canadian officials made the initial discovery (SN: 4/18, p. 388).

Most of the pollution control agencies will become part of the new Environmental Protection Agency, an independent agency proposed by President Nixon last July 9, which becomes reality Dec. 2. And this month the President announced that Assistant Attorney General William D. Ruckelshaus will be the administrator of the new agency, subject to Senate confirmation (SN: 11/14, p. 382).

Hickel's tack in pollution control was vigorous enforcement action. This is the least expensive technique (as opposed, for example, to grants for industrial or municipal cleanup), and Ruckelshaus is expected to follow the same course. The 38-year-old Republican was active in prosecuting polluting industries when he was a deputy attorney general in Indiana, and he was author of the 1963 Indiana Air Pollution Control Act. Younger and more



Justice

Ruckelshaus: Facing large obstacles.

liberal Justice Department lawyers approve of Ruckelshaus.

And his statements since the announcement of his appointment indicate that he is friendly toward the nation's growing numbers of environmentalists. For example, he says he stands firmly in favor of allowing continuation of the tax exemption for public interest law firms engaged in environmental litigation, which the Internal Revenue Service indicated last week it probably will do. Ruckelshaus also suggested he plans no slavish adherence to Administration guidelines on pollution control; the Administration to date has been more talk than action in its pollution abatement efforts, he says.

But even if he is zealous and capable—and the signs are that he is—Ruckelshaus will not have an easy time of it.

Industry interests have already wormed their way into the pollution control agencies and their 5,650 personnel. Although the total budget for the agencies this year is \$1.4 billion, this figure is deceptive. Actually about \$800 million of this total is for FWQA's sewer grant program and some agencies have been given short shrift, indeed—the Bureau of Solid Waste Management, for example, gets \$15 million a year and the Bureau of Water Hygiene \$2.3 million. Some of the glaring failures in pollution monitoring have been a result simply of lack of enough money for necessary scientific equipment and personnel.

Ruckelshaus will inherit some outstanding personnel—FWQA's Stein and HEW's Dr. C. C. Johnson, head of the Environmental Health Service, are two. But he inherits some of the other kind, too. "I don't envy him a bit," says one Interior official. "By and large, the people he's getting from FWQA are second rate sewer engineers, for example." □

