

## Environmental coalition of 10 groups attacks Reagan policies

Conservationists pointed a finger at President Reagan for the first time last week when they released a summary of environmental policy changes in the 14 months since he took office. "President Reagan has broken faith with the American people on environmental protection," begins the 35-page document—called an "indictment" by the 10 national environmental groups that prepared it. "He and his appointed officials have simply refused to do the job that the laws require."

The report levels more than 200 specific charges at the administration for reversing protective policies on air and water quality, public lands and natural resources. Rather than any single action, "we were most surprised by the magnitude of what we found," said Edward Norton of the Wilderness Society, at a March 31 press conference in Washington, D.C., announcing the report. "We realized that the whole was greater than the sum of the parts... and much worse than even we expected."

The indictment represents a major shift in strategy on the part of environmentalists who have, until now, focused their fire on individual cabinet members. But the study found an "across-the-board pattern" in the actions of those individuals, said Richard Ayres of the Natural Resources Defense Council. Agrees Norton: "It isn't [Environmental Protection Agency chief Anne] Gorsuch and it isn't [Assistant Agriculture Secretary John] Crowell and it isn't [Interior Secretary James] Watt and it isn't [Energy Secretary James] Edwards. It's Reagan."

According to the indictment, administration actions in the past year include:

- weakening air pollution controls by proposals to increase lead in gasoline and double auto nitrogen oxide and carbon monoxide emission standards (SN: 2/27/82, p. 132; 3/20/82, p. 200);
- proposing opening wilderness areas to development, going against policies of Interior secretaries since the Wilderness Act passed in 1964 and discouraging additions to the system (SN: 11/21/81, p. 327);
- adding to acid rain problems by increasing SO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 1.5 million tons a year and a proposal to extend the deadline for meeting those standards;
- withdrawing strip mining regulations that protect prime U.S. farmland and decreasing the number of mining field inspectors from 145 to 69;
- halting enforcement actions against illegal dumpers of hazardous wastes and suspending prohibitions against burial of liquid wastes in drums, the practice that created Love Canal;
- paralyzing listing of endangered species—listing only one species (a tiny invertebrate that lives only in the National Zoo in Washington, D.C.) out of more than two dozen proposed by the Carter administration and proposing no new listings;

- requesting an increase in timber sales from national forests by four billion board feet, despite a depressed housing industry and timber backlog of 34 billion board feet;
- subsidizing the nuclear power industry by more than \$1 billion while eliminating funding for several solar energy and energy conservation programs.

Both EPA and Interior responded quickly to these and other charges. "We found the report seriously flawed," said EPA chief spokesman Byron Nelson, "full of exaggerations, half-truths, and outright inaccuracies." While Interior spokesmen made no comment on the report's accuracy, a prepared statement said that "we will not be influenced by a small number of special interest groups and their commercial leadership."

Norton emphasizes, however, that the 10 organizations have a combined membership of over one million. In addition to ignoring this current public support for environmental protection, Reagan is turning his back on a long bipartisan conservation tradition, the groups say. "In the last 20 years every president has made some kind of formal statement on safeguarding the environment," Norton told SCIENCE NEWS. Yet, except for one reference to weakening the Clean Air Act in his State of the Union message, he said, Reagan has not even mentioned the environment and seems to have no environmental policy. "When you look at our report it's clear what his policy is," says Norton. "I'm afraid we'll only see more of the same from this administration." —L. Tangley

## Recycling synthetic fibers profitably

Although many materials, including aluminum and paper, are now recycled profitably, waste synthetic fibers like nylon and polyester—especially in the form of used clothing—are usually burned and buried. Chemist Orlando A. Battista, however, believes that processes he invented while working for FMC Corp. several years ago for converting waste nylon and polyester fibers and textiles into a useful form are now economically practical. Recently, The O. A. Battista Research Institute in Fort Worth, Tex., purchased Battista's patents from his former employer. "This whole concept is something I've been wanting to develop for a long time," Battista told SCIENCE NEWS.

In Battista's method, acids and bases break down and hydrolyze the fibers. Battista says the treatment "unhinges" the microcrystals in the fibers to produce fragments 100 to 200 angstroms in size. These fine particles, when dispersed in water, form a gel-like colloidal suspension of insoluble nylon or polyester microcrystals.

One advantage of his process is that it can handle polyester-cotton blends, Battista says. The chemistry of the unhinging process is different for each type of fiber. Even separating a nylon-polyester mixture is technically possible, he says.

Battista sees a variety of uses for the microcrystal gels depending on their purity. Nylon microcrystals, for example, are useful as suspending ingredients for printing ink pigments to keep them from settling. Thin, clear nylon films can be fused to metals, like aluminum, simply by evaporating the water and passing the sheets under a heater. Nylon microcrystals, which are tiny enough to fit into hair follicles, may also have value in cosmetics.

The most serious flaw in the process is possible contamination, especially in fiber

mixtures and because of dyes and other fiber treatments. Relatively pure wastes, such as the cuttings from garment manufacturers or the waste material from fiber production, are already recycled. Battista's process would become competitive if the usefulness and commercial value of his microcrystalline products prove to be high enough.

Although interest in recycling synthetic fibers varies, many manufacturers are looking for ways to cut costs by using materials more efficiently. At the Du Pont Co., spokesman Terrence Cressy says most of the waste material from fiber manufacture is reprocessed or reworked. Small quantities are also sold to other manufacturers for the production of plastics.

At the Textile Research Institute in Princeton, N.J., associate director Bernard Miller says no research on synthetic fiber recycling has been done in recent years because materials like polyester are still inexpensive. There is more interest in methods of saving energy during manufacture, for example, he says.

Fiberlock, Inc., in Memphis, Tenn., licenses a patented process that converts bits of polyester cloth, left over after cutting, into padding material for cushions. William Nunn, assistant to the president of Fiberlock, says that in recent months interest in recycling synthetics has grown significantly. However, because of the complicated mixture of materials found in used, discarded clothing, there is yet little interest in recycling synthetic materials in clothing.

Battista remains confident that a new industry is waiting to emerge. "Naturally, like all new concepts, it takes a while to sell the idea. I believe we're just at the point where the cost of new textiles is such that recycling of the waste is now economical. It's the missing link in the recycling of our waste materials." —I. Peterson