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Letters

Environmental bureaucracy

"Revamping EPA's Science" (SN: 4/11/92, p.234) speaks to many concerns of those of us both scientifically literate and environmentally concerned.

Before resigning in disgust in 1989, I performed computer programming and analysis for New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection.

Environmental programs urgently need evaluation as to whether they are actually accomplishing anything worthwhile. Entirely too often I found myself supporting regulatory activities that were ill thought out and performed by people who did not know the slightest thing about the industry they were regulating. One office did not even know within one order of magnitude the number of chemicals they were supposed to be registering in industries covered by their regulations.

This Week

- 388 At Last, Neutrino Results From GALLEX
- 388 Bright, bendable light-emitting diodes
- 389 Antipsychotic drug doses climb over time
- 389 Explanation for premature and delayed labor
- 390 Oxygen damage: Role in preeclampsia?
- 390 Teasing out dietary cholesterol's impact
- 390 Galactic black hole: X marks the spot?
- 391 Chemical tug can make water flow uphill

Research Notes

- 396 Behavior
- 396 Biology
- 398 Chemistry
- 399 Technology

Articles

392 Sticky Situations

Cover: Cell-surface receptors named cell adhesion molecules (CAMs) show up as yellow and red patches on a nerve cell taken from a sea snail. Neuroscientists recently found evidence that these molecules help nerve cells move around during learning. Other researchers have found that CAMs play a role in such diverse processes as embryonic development, viral infection and the spread of cancer cells. (Photo: Eric R. Kandel/Columbia University)



Departments

- 386 Books
- 387 Letters

Science Service, a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921, gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of disadvantaged groups. Through its Youth Program it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the *Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students*.

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Of more concern is the lack of other kinds of research. Some of us see a real need for development of *real* alternatives to current technologies. In the past much, if not most, environmental progress has come from inventors who have devised better ways of doing things.

Perhaps even more important in the long run is the development of broad-based research that embraces the totality of human life and places various environmental activities in perspective (to use a much misused word, a "holistic" approach). All too often I witnessed efforts that would accomplish little at great human expense when an alternative plan — while costing the well connected a bit more — would improve life for the great majority as well as make a significant environmental advance.

Charles J. Divine
Greenbelt, Md.

Unfortunately, politics will likely repress the EPA's effectiveness more than poor science. If I recall correctly, one of President Bush's first official acts was to require the EPA to rewrite its findings regarding acid rain. The rewrite was necessary because the scientific facts were not "in keeping with administration policies."

Rick Roberts
Penngrove, Calif.

CORRECTION

Researchers assign an age of at least 350,000 years, not 1 million years, to the two hominid skulls recently discovered near the Han River in China ("Chinese skulls face evolutionary mosaic," SN: 6/6/92, p.373).

JUNE 13, 1992

387