



*Rochester Committee
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Statement to the NYS DEC, February 1, 1972*

*By: George G. Berg
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THE ROCHESTER COMMITTEE FOR SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION
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Statement
to the
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
February 1, 1972
by
George G. Berg

Summary

A plan that will guide environmental management in New York State is being prepared by the Department of Environmental Conservation (D.E.C.). D.E.C. held a public hearing on this topic on February 1. The statement which follows was submitted on behalf of the R.C.S.I. by Dr. George Berg. While the R.C.S.I. has supported a number of actions taken by the State of New York to help control pollution in the Genesee Region, Dr. Berg stressed that many environmental actions have been incomplete and poorly coordinated up to now, and named some ways of improving environmental planning and management.

Text of statement to D.E.C.

Our Committee has published over 130 science information bulletins which have been made available to D.E.C. personnel. Our bulletins provide scientific information on controversial issues. The evidence we gather may support one side or the other in a partisan controversy, but the R.C.S.I. is non-partisan, does not lobby, and provides its services without pay.

1. On pesticides, we have been active since 1962, presenting evidence in favor of banning persistent poisons, especially in the organochlorine family; we support the present NYS laws on pesticide licensing, and the related activities of the Cooperative Extension Association in promoting the minimum use of pesticides in agriculture. Of course we look forward to complete phasing out of all persistent poisons being broadcast in the environment. We recognize, however, that New York State imports food from states in which persistent pesticides are used in large quantities on food crops. We see a need for cooperation between the D.E.C. and the Department of Agriculture and Markets that will help expand local markets for locally produced low-pesticide food.

2. On sewage treatment, we have gathered evidence since 1964 that backed the clean-up of Monroe County waters. We consider the proposed sewage treatment activities in this county as a sound model for activities state-wide, and note that this includes phosphate removal at the sewage treatment plant. We recognize the need for a new State bond issue, and the need to get Federal reimbursement for the State expenditures on sewers and sewage treatment plants. In the long run, however, we see sewage treatment, preservation of agricultural land and recycling of materials as three related aspects of the same problem, and we urge the D.E.C. to explore ways for recycling sludge and nutrients from sewage to farmland. Ultimately, organic matter which comes from crops should be put back into crops.

3. On phosphate in detergents and in sewage, R.C.S.I. first raised this issue in New York State, originally in connection with polyphosphates in street salt and later on with detergents. We keep abreast of the publications of industrial spokesmen (Proctor and Gamble) and scientists, who claim that they have evidence in favor of continued use of phosphates and we find that their evidence is not generally valid for the Great Lakes or Finger Lakes basins. Curtailing of the phosphates in detergents used in the Great Lakes watershed is a high priority matter in our judgement; it is essential to the protection of water quality until suitable treatment plants are built and will in all probability be necessary afterwards as well. We therefore supported State laws that curtailed bulk uses of polyphosphates in washing products, and published evidence that favors the gradual banning of phosphate from most of the industrial products that go down sewers and into lakes. We criticized strongly the labels of some detergents, which confuse the housewife instead of informing her about the amount of phosphate in the product she buys, and we suggested a revision of State laws on labeling to give shoppers the clear and complete information they need.

4. On water pollution control we supported as ecologically sound the New York State doctrine of non-degradation of water. We note with regret, that the U. S. Government is tending now in the reverse direction, back to the old doctrine of "best use", as found in recent statements by Mr. Train and Mr. Ruckelshaus, which really amounts to the worst use of water. We hope that the New York State authorities represented by the D.E.C. will hold out against this federal pressure to go back to the cheap and dirty.

The State has established a water quality monitoring network. We have examined it and we are very critical of the way the data are being handled. There is no published summary or interpretation of the data, and although the printout is done by computer, the publication is so delayed as to be useless. We see a need for the D.E.C. to come up with an integrated environmental monitoring program. We suggest the environmental radiation survey done by the D.E.C. as a model for this program; this is the best you are doing now. In the future, we hope that information collected in New York State by the Corps of Engineers under their program of registration of industrial waste will become part of the records of water quality in New York State kept by the D.E.C.

5. On air pollution control, we examined the collection of data in Monroe County by instruments and procedures mandated by State and Federal laws, and found that this work had entirely too little to do either with the local problems of air pollution or with any use of the collected data. As a matter of fact, the first time that these automatically collected numbers were interpreted and published was when a joint committee of the R.C.S.I. and the League of Women Voters looked at them and processed them. In our county no one has the money or the resources to do this routinely. The D.E.C. needs an integrated data handling facility where useful data reduction will be performed on the information that is collected by monitoring instruments and where publication will be prompt.

6. On land use in Monroe County, our group collected evidence to protect wetlands from landfill, and we supported preservation of floodplain land and of green belts around towns. Those are piecemeal attempts at focusing our attention on a major problem. In the future we suggest that the D.E.C. plan to protect not only wetlands, but all shorelines and floodplains. Ecologically sound uses for these areas include recreation, wildlife conservation and agriculture, and much needs to be done to stop the exploitation of these limited resources by developers, highway builders, and solid waste disposal operators. Intensive uses of land should be encouraged elsewhere, and vast areas of suitable land are available in New York State.

7. In summary, the Rochester Committee for Scientific Information has been investigating environmental problems in the Genesee Region. We offer our experience with the gains in environmental management in our region as a model of what needs to be done at the state and federal levels of government.