

Environmental standards — facts and fantasies

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Environmental management should be based on facts, not pressure from environmental interest groups. With acid rain, ozone, and pesticides, there is a dichotomy between scientific data and public opinion. For example, termites produce 50 billion tons of greenhouse gases annually, 10 times more than burning fossil fuels, and the quantity of toxic materials spewed into the air from just three volcanoes exceeds all the air polluting materials produced by man. Changes in the ozone layer are related to chloride chemistry. Volcanism and seawater evaporation each contribute about 500 times the annual atmospheric chloride from production of chlorine and fluorocarbon compounds.

The pH of rainwater in pristine regions is 5.0 to 6.6. Two strokes of lightning over one square kilometre produce enough nitric acid to make 2 cm of rain with pH of 3.5.

The banning of DDT was based on allegations that DDT caused the death of birds, that it was so stable that it could never be eliminated from the environment, and that it might cause cancer. Similar unsubstantiated charges have been used against asbestos, PCBs, dioxin, and Alar. A person would have to eat 28,000 pounds of apples every day for 70 years to produce tumours from Alar residues.

Hot springs and mineral water resorts have elevated radioactivity. There is no proof that this radiation makes

people feel better, but there is no evidence that it has any ill effects.

An analysis of radon exposure versus lung cancer found that the correlation was negative at low levels — the more radon, the less lung cancer. Results from over 1,000 separate

studies are consistent: There is a threshold or cutoff point below which radiation is either harmless or beneficial. Low doses give accelerated development, increased resistance to disease, greater reproductivity, and longer lifespan. Low doses do not give proportionate harmful effects.