

THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

A Scripps-Howard Newspaper

GORDON HANNA, Editor

Published by The Memphis Publishing Co., 495 Union, Memphis, Tenn. 38101

W. FRANK AYCOCK JR., Business Manager

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|---------------------------|---|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Consolidated July 1, 1894 | { | The Commercial Appeal | Established 1889 |
| | | The Appeal | Established 1840 |
| | | The Avalanche | Established 1867 |

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SATURDAY MORNING, JANUARY 9, 1971

Nothing about recycling newspapers to save trees!

War On Pollution

A FEW years ago you could have paraphrased Mark Twain and said that everyone talks about pollution but no one does anything about it. Today that is untrue. Everyone's talking about it, and a lot is being done. Government in the United States is expected to pour more than two billion dollars into the war on pollution this year, and the cost will be higher in future years.

The problem, of course, is people.

Pollution of air, water and earth has been caused by human technology, population growth, and consumption of products deemed to be disposable, not to mention natural wastes.

Once upon a time nature had its own way of recycling the elements, chemicals, organic wastes and what have you. It has been man who has broken the cycle.

The present problem has been caused by the human tendency to concentrate on the front end — consumption of goods and services — while ignoring the sacrifices required to bring nature into balance. The irony is that the technology and science which have created the good life for man also have given him the tools to combat pollution, but they have not been utilized.

THUS, the crisis. Government and industry are now so aware of the problem that they are heaping billions of dollars a year into the technological means of cleaning up this nation, and hopefully this planet. What is hard on the population of the United States, now accustomed to luxuries and waste, is the need to re-evaluate the world they wished upon themselves.

Here and there a citizen rides a bicycle instead of driving an air-polluting auto. Or a housewife takes sacks and egg cartons back to the grocery store for reuse. But these are minor symbolic gestures. They make no dent in the situation.

In four years, American air pollution

has jumped from 142 million tons of contamination annually to more than 200 million.

The solid waste from cities and industries adds up to 360 million tons per year.

Add in the wastes from agriculture, mining and refining and the annual national total is 3.5 billion tons.

What is being done to salvage the country? Tough laws from Congress. Specific state laws with stiff penalties. Millions of dollars in industrial spending to curb pollution.

BUT the "throw-away" syndrome remains. Paper, cartons, boxes, bags are just a part. Cars, electric wiring, rubber, important metals and even human waste are the sources of materials or fertilizers which nature needs. The sludge from sewage can be nourishment to farmlands which provide the food we need. That is what recycling is all about.

By now we know that the resources of this planet are finite. That is, we can run out of petroleum or iron or bauxite — and even clean air. Any good computer programmer could show you how to resolve this problem. But there is a price.

Industries and government are finding this out, and are fighting for the survival of our more than 200 million people.

Now it is the people who need to be aware, to use nature's resources with thrift, and to recycle them in a way that does not upset the balance. It's one thing to lament the near extinction of the whooping crane, and quite another to think of a world in which there are too few fish — or that those caught might be contaminated chemically by man's technology.

Much as we depend upon technology to improve our lives, much as we enjoy contemporary affluence and the toss-away bottle, we can't forget that nature still rules our existence.

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