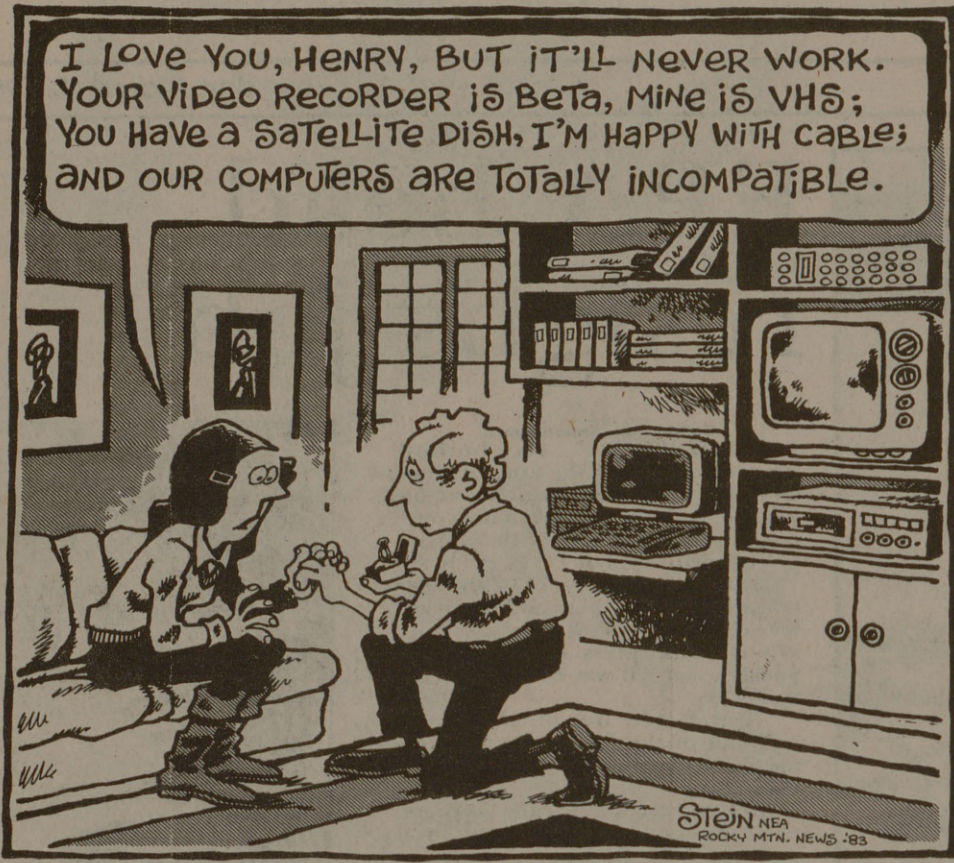


opinion

Unfinished story of toxic waste

by Maxwell Glen and Cody Shearer



Almost daily revelations about possible conflicts of interest and other indiscretions at the Environmental Protection Agency have prompted predictable rumblings. Journalists here make odds on how far the scandal's taint will reach; lawmakers have seemed more obsessed with constitutional powers than with public health.

Unfortunately, those outside this political drama deserve to be cynical. Sure to remain after congressional committees have stalked their prey are some legitimate questions about toxic waste.

For example, how safe is safe? In Missouri an entire town has been bought out by Uncle Sam because its dioxin count exceeds safe levels of 50 parts per billion. Roughly speaking, a part per billion is equivalent to a drop within a train of 100 tank cars, one second in 32 years, one Yankee fan in all the sell-out crowds in the history of the New York club. Environmentalist Gus Speth says the dangers of such "subtle menaces" vary "in inverse proportion to their ability to be quickly and easily understood."

Why do we allow the manufacture of such deadly substances as dioxin, of which only three ounces could wipe out New York City's population? Who decides to unleash dangerous substances on an unwitting populace? Does Congress have the political will to fully safeguard the soil and water of future generations

from outright poisoning?

While the answers are too complex to merit more than outline here, they have roots in America's tremendous industrial and technological growth during the 20th century. Waste products from textiles, metal finishing, tanneries, steel mills, pharmaceuticals, solvents and all manner of chemicals have generally been discarded by manufacturers in the cheapest way possible. While consumers happily reaped rewards of "better living through chemistry," producers often resorted to dumping byproducts to keep overhead down.

At first, the wastes were nominal in bulk; today the U.S. accumulates 350 pounds of hazardous waste per person per year. And yet, according to Samuel Epstein, a University of Illinois medical professor and author of a recently published book, "Hazardous Waste in America," federal lawmakers — even during the ecologically-oriented 1970s — have attempted with only kid gloves to take on polluters.

Take, for instance, the Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976, a well-meaning law that, by all regards, has become practically useless. TSCA empowers the EPA to ban certain toxins before they are marketed. Unfortunately, the law remains only half implemented, underfunded and excludes byproducts from its purview. As a result, argues Epstein, the EPA has banned only a few dozen the several thousand chemicals invented since 1976.

Or consider another 1976 statute, the

Resource Conservation and Act. The law exempted small and any hybrid of toxic and material from regulation; too much of the nation's damage leeches through legal loopholes.

Then there's Superfund. Financed by contributions from private industry, the Superfund law also entitles to contribute money for cleanup. However, most states, already for cash don't set aside money for cleanup; if the state doesn't share to a cleanup effort, the response is statutorily limited.

Perhaps more discouraging is that certain solutions already the safe management of. Many substances can be recycled or incinerated safely and produce non-toxic substitutes are available for many dangerous products. Yet the public and regulators have been slow to research and develop new applications.

Despite the overwhelming implications of ignoring these problems in toxic management, lawmakers may be environmentalist if only EPA chief Ann Calves her job in the coming year.

But America's toxic mess beyond the combined glories of private dumps and poison-laden around the U.S. Without pressure the grass roots, continues to disregard for life-threatening will assure the recurrence of the horror stories in the future.

How to restructure your own bank loan

by Art Buchwald

Dunaway told Tinker and me the other day that the bank was going to foreclose on his house because he was unemployed and could not make his payments. He asked us if we had any ideas.

Tinker said he would go down to the bank with him and see if he could help him out. I tagged along to give Dunaway moral support.

"We're here today," Tinker told the vice president, "to restructure Dunaway's loan."

"And what exactly does that mean?" the VP asked.

"Dunaway is not able to pay on his note, and therefore we want to postpone his payments until he gets a job."

"We don't do that."

"The heck you don't," Tinker said. "You people are restructuring loans all the time. You do it with Poland every year."

"Poland's a country. Mr. Dunaway is an individual."

"You're doing it for Pan American Airways."

"Pan American Airways is a company."

"Why isn't Mr. Dunaway entitled to the same treatment you give Poland and Pan Am?"

"We can't foreclose on Poland. It would start a panic in world banking circles. And we have to give Pan American a chance, or we'll never see our money again."

"How much does Poland owe you?"

"Somewhere in the area of a billion dollars."

"Well, Mr. Dunaway only owes you \$50,000, and you have a better chance of getting that back from him than you have of getting your billion dollars from Poland."

"You're obviously ignorant as to the way banks operate. When someone owes us \$50,000 we take his house. When someone owes us over a million we have to work something out to make it possible for him to pay us back."

"Then what you are saying is that Mr. Dunaway doesn't owe you enough money to get any respect?"

"Don't put words in my mouth. What I am saying is that we don't restructure \$50,000 mortgage loans. It isn't worth our time to postpone the payments on them."

"Fair enough," Tinker said. "That's why we've come to see you. We're not here to pay back the \$50,000. We're here to borrow another \$950,000, so we can owe the bank an even million."

I was tugging on Tinker's sleeve nervously.

The VP said, "You must be crazy to ask for a \$950,000 loan. What kind of collateral can you put up?"

"We'll put up the same collateral Mexico and Brazil did to get their loans."

"What do you know about Mexico and Brazil?"

"I understand each of them owes you \$500 million and you can't get your money back," Tinker said. "I have it on good authority you are going to loan them more money so they can pay the interest on the money they've borrowed. Mr. Dunaway is willing to work out a similar arrangement. If you loan him the money to pay the interest on his mortgage, we won't tell anyone about Brazil and Mexico."

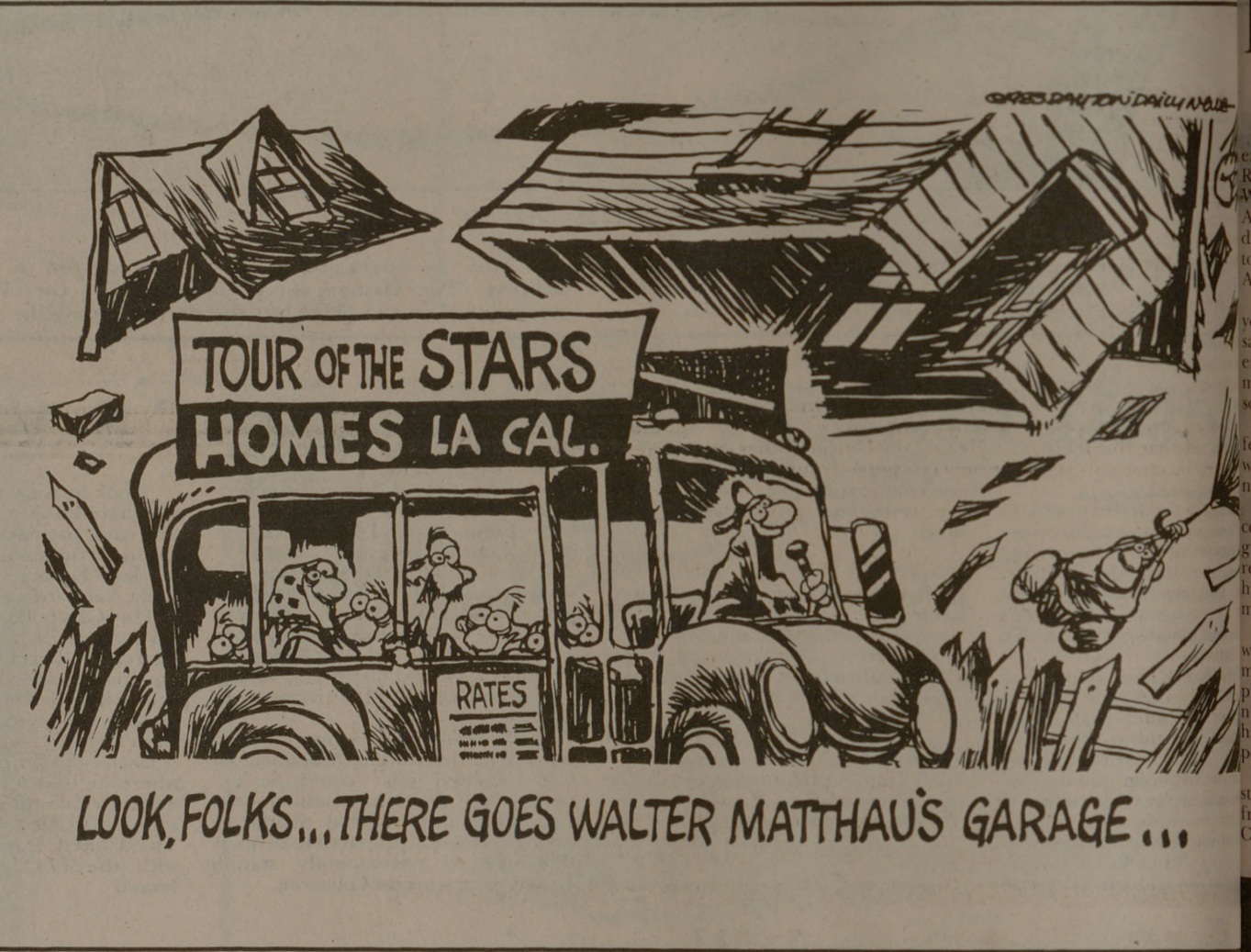
"You can't threaten me," the VP said. "That's what you think. According to my information, you have \$4 billion in loans outstanding to the OPEC countries. Now that the price of oil has plummeted, your OPEC clients have informed you they won't be able to meet their obligations. If word gets out that these loans could be in default, you'll have a run on your bank that will make the Penn Square debacle look like a church picnic."

"What do you want from me?" the VP said, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief.

"We want you to give Mr. Dunaway the same financial courtesy you extended to Poland. Allow him time to get a job, and don't foreclose on his house until he gets back on his feet."

"I can't make this decision myself. It will have to go to the Board of Directors."

"Well, don't take too long about it," Tinker snarled. "You're not dealing with some banana republic."



Letters: Sex a decision made by two

Editor:

To: Shawn Stevens

It may be easier for you believing that morality is a unified thing. Yet morals are something every individual should decide for themselves. If morals include pre-marital sex, they aren't necessarily based on having a form of contraceptives available. Not all teens go around "secretly" getting contraceptives. The secrecy of using contraceptives, comes after the decision to have sex, which eliminates different beliefs and confrontation within a family. If pre-marital sex is not wrong to an individual, they will probably participate in it with or without birth control devices. Statistics prove that there are many unwed "mothers" in this country.

Stating that pre-marital is a temporary feeling is generalizing an attitude that is different for every person involved. Not everyone loses their dignity and feels guilty about sex before marriage. Marriage may be the only commitment worthy enough of sex for some, but the belief of "love" is also a commitment in itself.

To say that Steve Patti has only his own pleasure in mind may or may not be true. The male race is not always the cause for pre-marital sex. It is a decision made by two people, so there is obviously a mutual want present. If your morals outcast pre-marital sex you should be sure enough to say no when the opportunity arises. There are many girls in this country that feel a desire and go with it. To rest the guilt on Steve or all of the "lustful" male population is overstating a fact that guys have less to worry about.

C. Jackson '85

Sex vs. lust

Editor:

This letter is in response to Shawn Stevens' naive sermon on sexuality and morality. Her opinion on contraceptives was so scrambled that I won't even comment on it.

When Shawn was in high school she "knew it was wrong to be sexually active" and about "the problems pre-marital sex causes." Wrong!? Says who? Sex doesn't cause problems, ignorance does.

Shawn also explained that American lifestyle is lousy "because lusty men seek to advance it." As far as lust goes, it takes two to tango. She asks why there is so much lust in soap operas and advertising. At least two of America's soaps are written by a woman for a target audience of women. Half of the television ads I see

Brian P...

Sex and taxes

Editor:

I have but a few words to say to people who support the squeal law, first your prerogative. But I also hope you're willing to have your taxes increased significantly so that welfare checks issued to those unwed mothers do not support themselves and their mate children.

Kids are bombarded with the sex from all angles: television, press, movies, magazines, etc. If they are to be sexually active and want to use birth control method, (granted, abstinence is the best method), they means, they should be able to do so out the fear of their parents being notified. I can't even begin to imagine how high the birth rate would soar if the squeal law is passed. Can you?

Jan Crawford

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Questions or comments concerning any editorial matter should be directed to the editor.

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Letters to the Editor should not exceed 300 words in length, and are subject to being cut if they are longer. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must also be signed and show the address and phone number of the writer.

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