

Government figures show sad state of America's air

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a one-two punch on the state of America's air, government figures revealed Wednesday that 2.4 billion pounds of toxic chemicals are released annually while 100 million people live where other pollutants, chiefly from automobiles, exceed federal standards.

The report on toxic substances, poisonous materials released by chemical plants and other industries, is the first comprehensive look at them. Many have been linked to cancer, birth defects, reproductive dysfunctions, neurological disorders and genetic mutations.

Among the 328 individual and classes of chemicals surveyed were 60 government-identified cancer-causing agents; methyl isocyanate, the toxic gas that killed at least 3,400 people and injured some 20,000 in Bhopal, India, in December 1984; and phosgene, a nerve gas used in World War I.

"The magnitude of this problem far exceeds our worst fears," said Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., who released the preliminary Environmental Protection Agency figures for 1987 at a news conference with Reps. Mickey Leland, D-Texas; Jim Florio, D-N.J., and Gerry Sikorski, D-Minn.

Waxman said the EPA "has broken commitment after commitment to deal with this problem" during the 19-year life of the Clean Air Act, and all four lawmakers said they'll soon introduce legislation to force the EPA to control these emissions.

Only seven of the substances are now regulated by the EPA, although a separate agency, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, has set standards for more than 400 toxics in the workplace.

Donald Clay, EPA's top official on air quality issues, acknowledged that more should be done to protect against toxic pollutants but said the agency has been hamstrung in dealing with 320 separate chemicals one at a time under current law.

"The idea of going down 320 (separate) rules... is just too cumbersome" especially since in many cases industry can be expected to contest tighter restrictions in the courts, Clay told reporters, adding that "some other approach is needed."

He suggested, for example, dealing with the toxic emissions on a "source" basis instead of each chemical separately as required by the 1970 law that envisioned far fewer toxic chemicals than now being released.

As to the preliminary EPA figures released by Waxman, Clay acknowledged the volume of pollutants were greater than he had expected. "It's a

Study shows Gulf Coast firms release most toxins

WASHINGTON (AP) — Petrochemical plants along the Gulf Coast are largely responsible for the annual release of 229.9 million pounds of toxic chemicals into the air by Texas industry, according to government figures indicating Texas led the country in poisonous emissions.

Louisiana ranked second according to the Environmental Protection Agency preliminary data released Wednesday, with emissions totaling 134.5 million pounds per year.

The national total was 2.4 billion pounds of toxic chemicals, including substances that have been linked to cancer, birth defects, reproductive dysfunctions, neurological disorders and genetic mutations.

Rep. Mickey Leland, a Houston Democrat, said the findings reveal a need for strong, immediate federal regulation. The EPA's failure to take leadership, he said, "has jeopardized the health of our constituents."

"Texas has suffered the most from the EPA's failure to exercise leadership in this area," Leland said.

EPA spokesman Roger Meacham in Dallas said the data is preliminary and subject to change.

"I think it would be unfair and a disservice to the public to say that it spells death, doom and destruction and an imminent threat to public health, because it doesn't," Meacham said. The greatest source of the pollutants is the petrochemical industry, he said.

Meacham said the agency believes in the need for a more thorough regulation of these emissions "because the potential is there for long-term public health effects because (petrochemical) companies use toxic chemicals."

Leland charged that the EPA has forced states and local jurisdictions to decide between public health and economic well-being.

"Local jurisdictions are told that if they implement strong regulations against toxic air releases, companies will be forced to close plants and relocate to areas with no regulation," he said.

Leland said a company in states such as California or New Jersey cannot compete with one located in Louisiana or Texas because air quality standards there are not as stringent or as vigorously enforced.

Leland said uniform standards are needed to reduce the routine release of toxic pollutants. He promised to introduce legislation after the Easter recess that will list hazardous air pollutants and mandate that the sources use the best available technology to reduce their emissions. Leland said that in Houston alone, the fire department in 1988 responded to an average of 1.3 hazardous materials alarms every day.

"It's time for the EPA to stop dancing and start doing its job," Leland said, "protecting the environment and the citizens of this nation."

Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif. said, "The magnitude of this problem far exceeds our worst fears."

big number. I think it's a health problem that needs to be addressed."

EPA, meanwhile, released its annual report on air quality, and concluded more than 100 million Americans live in areas where they breathe unhealthy air, with pollutants exceeding federal standards.

EPA said ozone pollution and carbon monoxide emissions, both largely caused by automobiles, remain a major problem, especially in urban areas.

Ozone levels increased 5 percent from 1986 to 1987 and, largely because of the unusual heat last summer, jumped another 14 percent in 1988, according to the EPA statistics

covering 1978 to 1987 for five pollutants and through last year for ozone.

EPA did, however, note a long-term reduction of all six of the pollutants surveyed.

The comprehensive information on toxics was collected for the first time under a "community right to know" amendment to the nation's Superfund law that passed in the House by a single vote in 1986.

Information was shown on a state-by-state basis but Sikorski said more localized information has been given to each state, to inform residents of a community about emissions from their local plants.

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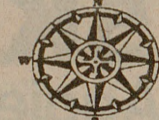


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Tabloid TV

(Continued from page 8)

of a difference between these types of shows and older, more established talk shows.

"People are oriented toward this type of format," he said. "They want to reject all this coldness and brittleness of society and rehumanize instead of dehumanize."

"Tabloid TV is simply a version of that. It's the tawdry side, but how far is it to go from the old Johnny Carson show to tabloid TV? How far is it from (David) Letterman?"

Tomlinson believes these tabloid programs are popular because the public often can relate to the problems being discussed on the air.

"It's almost like an Ann Landers type of thing," he said. "People feel better when their problem has been aired even if it hasn't been solved. They can poke at it and look at it. It makes more sense to them. At least they feel better about it because it got out in the open."

Rodger Lewis, educational television program director of KAMU-TV, thinks these tabloid programs are a fad. He doubts they will be around for much longer because the television industry is constantly changing.

Lewis, who is most offended by Downey's show, said these programs contain elements of both entertainment and television.

"There's a certain amount of entertainment in all journalism," Lewis said. "We may not think so, but there is. Journalism is simply reporting. If you look at journalism in American history, you'll find the concept of unbiased journalism is relatively new."

Smith said these kinds of programs won't be a threat to the modern American press.

"It's not damaging to the mainstream American news media," he said. "Historically, when new media came along the old ones changed slightly and supported themselves. Radio was scared when TV came along. Radio is bigger now than it

has ever been."

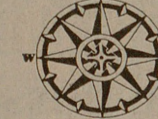
Rogers believes newspapers can deal with sensitive issues just as well or better than tabloid television.

"I think newspapers can and have dealt with sensitive topics before," he said. "They can deal with it more intelligently and more completely and without the trapping sideshowism that goes on in these TV shows."

Tomlinson thinks the programs will exist as long as there are people who want to see those kinds of issues dealt with that way on the air. As long as the programs are available, people will see them, he said.

Tomlinson said the most important thing for modern journalists to do is try to separate themselves from these kinds of tabloid journalism.

"I would hope it makes us a little better," he said. "I hope we look at that and say, 'We'd better not ever look at that and see ourselves.' We'd better look at it and say that's the definition of that, now let's define what we are. There needs to be a difference between the two."



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