

Rachel's Environment & Health News

#10 - Acid Rain Killing Sugar Maple Trees In U.S. And Canada, Say Experts Seeking Tighter Rules

February 01, 1987

Environmental experts say that the sugar maple tree in the Northeast U.S. is threatened with extinction unless drastic steps are taken to control acid rain. Sulfur dioxide coming from coal-burning plants and factories is chemically transformed in the atmosphere before falling to earth as acid rain. Forestry experts say that acid rain weakens leaves' waxy protective layers (which help them fight disease) and hurts root systems by leaching out sugars and amino acids necessary for growth. By 1982, the population of the sugar maple trees in Quebec had declined 32%. In summer, 1986 an aerial survey showed an 82% decline. In 1985- 1986, maple syrup production dropped 26% in NY, 38% in VT and 50% in parts of Canada.

Researchers say the only way to slow the decline of trees and waterways is to legislate strict environmental limits on the amount of emissions a factory is allowed and require industries to install sulfur-removal equipment in their smokestacks. The coal-producing states and companies have succeeded so far in their opposition to such standards. The Reagan Administration has questioned the link between emissions and environmental damage.

--Peter Montague

=====

RADIATION COMPANY OFFICIAL PUT ON PROBATION FOR COVERING UP RADIOACTIVITY LEAK INTO SEWER

A federal district court judge put on probation a former Atomic Energy Commission member who covered up a 1982 spill of cobalt-laden water at an irradiation plant where he was vice president. International Nutronics, Inc. of San Jose, CA was fined the maximum amount, \$35,000, for not reporting the Dec. 6, 1982 at its Dover, NJ plant and for hiding evidence of the accident from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). The amount of tainted water spilled into a public sewer system from a tank used to irradiate and purify gems is not known.

--Peter Montague

=====

NEW JERSEY PROPOSES BAN ON ALL STRIPED BASS COMMERCIAL SALES BECAUSE OF PCB CONTAMINATION

The NJ Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has proposed regulations that would ban the sale of striped bass in the state because of high levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and dioxin. Recent studies have shown that more than half the striped bass caught in the region have PCB levels above the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) recommended level of 2 parts per million. Recreational fishing would not be affected by the ban, but the advisory to limit eating stripers, American eels, catfish, white perch and bluefish, in effect since 1983, would remain.

--Peter Montague

=====

SCIENTIST SAYS LEAD POLLUTION MOST PREVALENT ENVIRONMENTAL DISEASE AMONG AMERICAN PEOPLE

A senior scientist for the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) said the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) proposed maximum permissible levels of lead in drinking water should be cut in half, from 20 parts per billion (ppb) to 10 ppb. The current EPA standard is 50 ppb. The new standard is scheduled to be put into effect by 1988 but would not be enforceable by states until 18 months later.

Dr. Ellen K. Silbergeld of EDF says a majority of Americans now have amounts of lead in their bloodstreams that are higher than the

level considered dangerous to health. She said drinking water accounted for about 40% of the blood lead levels, with the rest coming from gasoline fumes and other pollution, lead in the soil, paint and other materials. Dr. Silbergeld called lead poisoning "our most prevalent environmental disease."

The director of the drinking water office of the EPA said that, in light of several studies that suggest that lead at levels lower than 20 parts per billion could result in some adverse health effects, the agency is reanalyzing its data and considering an even tougher standard. The president of the Lead Industries Association calls the EDF talk of a lead epidemic "irresponsible and self-serving," saying other civilized countries considered 50 to 100 parts per billion safe.

--Peter Montague

=====

FDA REJECTS CONSUMER GROUP'S REQUEST FOR BAN OF NUTRASWEET

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has rejected a petition by the consumer group, Consumer Nutrition Institute, to ban the artificial sweetener, Nutrasweet (aspartame) because of concerns for public health. In July, 1986 the consumer group said that 80 Nutrasweet users had suffered epileptic seizures. In Oct. 1986 the complaint also cited more than 60 people who reported eye damage after using the sweetener.

--Peter Montague

=====

FDA REJECTS CONSUMER GROUP'S REQUEST FOR BAN OF NUTRASWEET

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has rejected a petition by the consumer group, Consumer Nutrition Institute, to ban the artificial sweetener, Nutrasweet (aspartame) because of concerns for public health. In July, 1986 the consumer group said that 80 Nutrasweet users had suffered epileptic seizures. In Oct. 1986 the complaint also cited more than 60 people who reported eye damage after using the sweetener.

--Peter Montague

=====

Descriptor terms: disease; us; lead; blood; drinking water; air pollution; automobiles; edf; ellen silbergeld; lead industries association; epa; regulations; enforcement; fines; probation; water pollution; spills; cobalt; ca; radioactivity; ca; nj; nuclear regulatory commission; irradiation; international nutronics; coverups; fraud; wildlife; fish; striped bass; bans; fda; nj; american eel; white perch; bluefish; pcbs; food safety; catfish; fda; consumers; bans; public health; seizures; aspartame; consumer nutrition institute; food safety; nutrasweet; epilepsy; acid rain; air pollution; vegetation; forests; sugar maple trees; ny; vt; canada; standards; emissions; sulfur dioxide; coal; ronald reagan;