

119 MAY 1996

Environmental education for 'eco-smart' children

who constantly pesters his parents to use less and "conserve" energy, for one day we might run out. This pressure results in part from school material such as the EPA children's activity books on water conservation, which proclaim, "We need to save water! This is also called conserving water—not wasting it so we'll have enough for the future!" The TV special based upon 50

fish than they did earlier this century, and that burning fossil fuels can make rain more acidic. But a \$700-million study commissioned by Congress, the National Acid Precipitation assessment Program (NAPAP), concluded that acid rain is not a major source of problems in eastern forests and fisheries.

One the contrary, the nitrogen contained in acid rain actually helps much of the eastern forest by providing a necessary nutrient. It also turns out that most acid lakes in the Northeast have been acidic for most of their history. Fish could live in them temporarily when logging of forests for paper and pulp made the watersheds more alkaline. But the watersheds returned to their natural acidity when the farms and dairies became uneconomic and the forests grew back.

NAPAP determined that little damage could be attributed to acid rain in the United States, and even then only at very high altitudes in a few small areas. (The mirror effects of acid rain on this continent, and the history of lake acidity in the United States, were explained by soil scientist Edward C. Krug in "Fish Story" in the Spring 1990 issue of Policy Review).

6: We Use Too Much
Last year the "New York Times" ran a story on the "Newest Parental Nightmare", the "eco-smart" child

Unfortunately, this effort to watchdog water use reflects a simplistic view of natural resources. Water in the United States will not "run out", although it may be misallocated.

By Jonathan H. Adler

Foundation as a source of educational materials in its booklet ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE (GRADES K-12). Materials provided include acid rain educational activities for grades 4-8 and a curriculum for grades 6-12 that repeat these charges time and time again.

Similar information is available from other sources as well. The children's comic book "Water in Your Hands" published by the Soil and Water Conservation Society and distributed by the federal government, claims, "Acid precipitation can harm plants as well as plants and animals that live in streams and lakes. Thousands of miles from the source of pollution. Already there are many lakes in which only a few things can live because of high acid levels." The proposed solution is for people to use less energy. They should drive less and use less electricity. The less you use, the less coal-burning power plants must produce. That may mean less acid precipitation.

The curricula state correctly that many trees are dying in the eastern United States, that northeastern lakes and streams have fewer trout and other sport

textive mechanism." This can be seen in many common foods. While "everyone" worries about minute amounts of dioxin, Ames has discovered that "there is a lot more of a dioxin-like compound naturally in broccoli than you will ever be exposed to through dioxin contamination in the environment." But Ames points out, even the higher level of carcinogenic compounds naturally present in foods poses a negligible health risk.

As a result of the scare over Alar—a substance used to strengthen apple stems and prevent apples from falling off the tree prematurely—frightened "mom" were calling the EPA to see if one could safely "apple juice down the drain." Yet Alar residues posed no threat to their children. As Rutgers professor Joseph Rosen noted, Alar "has not been identified as the cause of a single childhood cancer." In fact, according to Dr. Sanford Miller, dean of the University of Texas Health

Science Center's Graduate School of Biomedical Science, "The risk of pesticide residues to consumers is effectively zero." As he told the late columnist Warren Brookes, "This is what some 14 scientific societies, representing over 100,000 microbiologists, toxicologists, and food scientists, said at the time of the ridiculous Alar scare. But we were ignored."

Linda Lowery Earth Day, a book designed for children in grades K-4, asserts, "People don't need use chemicals on their crops and lawns. There are safer, more natural ways to protect plants and help them grow."

To emphasize concern over pesticides even further, the National Environmental Education Act requires that the EPA annually present a Rachel Carson Award in honor of the author who first brought fear of pesticides into the mainstream with her 1962 book "Silent Spring." A biography of Carson is also one of the first a new series of children's books published by Simon & Schuster's Silver Burdett press.

While Carson deserves credit for raising awareness of the potentially damaging effects DDT on eagle and osprey populations, many of the concerns she promoted, such as fear of the risks of pesticide residues on foods, are greatly overblown. Metzger and Whittaker's "This Planet Is Mine" tells parents eco-educators that pesticide use is killing millions of people, and that "children often receive greater pesticide exposure" than adults. However, the pathbreaking work of Bruce Ames, a biochemist at the University of California at Berkeley, has demonstrated that pesticide residues on foods, such as fruits and vegetables, pose no significant health risk.

Notes Ames, "99.9 percent of all the pesticides we ingest, by weight, are natural, produced by the fruit and vegetable plants themselves as part of their protection."

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clency have enabled farmers to produce more food while devoting less land to agriculture. Fewer trees are cut down and fewer wetlands are filled to meet increases in food demand.

5: Acid Rain Is Destroying Our Forests

The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles tell our children that "acid rain" pollutes rivers and kills fish and trees. 50 SIMPLE THINGS claims, "Acid rain is extremely harmful to plants, rivers, and lakes.... In some places it is killing forests. And it pollutes the water that animals and people need to drink." The EPA lists the Acid Rain