

Pollution — the skull-and-crossbones of modern civilization — has been companion to man throughout the centuries. Did not the Romans build the world's first major sewer system in order to avoid water pollution? Did not Julius Caesar ban chariot-riding at night because of noise? Has not smog permeated the air since the legendary Prometheus gave man his gift of fire?

Man and animals alike have deposited their waste upon the land since time began. Once, nature was able to cope. But industrialization, unplanned economic growth, the population explosion and advanced technology, together with urbanization, affluence and leisure — all have contributed to the plundering of the environment. The atomic age has produced its own silent pollutant — radioactivity, and an endless line of invisible contaminants, pesticides, herbicides and other mineral and chemical substances have spread their deadly agents throughout the world.

Why have the world's oceans, seas, rivers and lakes become receptacles of the garbage of nations, the land a waste bin for billions upon billions of annual discards, and the air riddled with excess amounts of noxious gases?

Experts say the cause lies with man himself, who has worked against rather than with nature. Now man must innovate in the opposite direction to protect himself and his environment from his own exploitation.

As a result of man's growing awareness that massive steps must be taken in the war against pollution, public and private bodies throughout the world are starting to organize broader programs in a more integrated and coordinated way to arrest and reverse environmental deterioration.

Among these bodies is the National Research Council of Canada which has announced a long-term program to assist Canadian authorities responsible for pollution abatement and control. This program will bring together the best scientific expertise in Canada to focus on the technical aspects of environmental quality problems.



The Council has established an Associate Committee on Scientific Criteria for Environmental Quality to collate and publish an integrated set of scientific requirements on which an evaluation of the quality of the environment can be based. The criteria will be designed to assist authorities at the Federal, Provincial and Municipal levels who have the responsibility for the formulation and enforcement of environmental quality standards. This new Committee replaces NRC's Associate Committee on Water Pollution, formed in 1965, whose terms of reference were no longer adequate nor appropriate in view of major developments in the field of water resources under the responsibility of the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources.

The Chairman of the new Committee is Dr. William Hoar, Chairman of the Department of Zoology at the University of British Columbia. The Vice-Chairman is Dr. G. C. Butler, Director of NRC's Division of Biology.

For over 50 years, Associate Committees of the National Research Council of Canada have studied, coordinated, and promoted research on problems of national concern. NRC Committees have been formed to deal with such diversified topics as aircraft noise, automatic control, National Building Code, bird hazards to aircraft, forest fire research, computers, oceanography, and space research. Members are experts in different aspects and disciplines related to the problem placed before them and are drawn from university, industry and government. Committees studying particular problems collect and collate the necessary information, delineate research problems, co-ordinate research and may recommend new research necessary to the solution of a problem.

The Associate Committee on Scientific Criteria for Environmental Quality will be served by a Secretariat within the Council's Division of Biology. The Secretariat will conduct the scientific work of preparing numerical guidelines on environmental quality for the Committee's consideration and approval. →

***Toward the fight
against pollution
Threat to balance
of nature***