

their persistence in our natural surroundings will be assembled. Statistics as to how much may be sold and how these substances may accumulate in our natural food chain can also be collected. With this information, we shall be in a position to see whether the new substance, or family of substances, will have a harmful effect on our environment and on human health in this country. Its impact on our quality of life will be known in advance. It will be known before it is mass produced and before it gets into our natural environment in a big way.

This legislation, aimed at dealing with environmental contaminants before they contaminate our natural surroundings, has not been developed in a vacuum. We have been in close consultation with industry. We have also sought the advice of the provinces. Numerous changes have been made and a number of suggestions have been incorporated in Bill C-3 to make it more effective. There is a minimum of red tape involved. There is no overlapping with existing laws. Our new Environmental Contaminants Act will fill in gaps in existing legislation. It will backstop other laws, federal and provincial. It will round out environmental legislation in this country. It will also help government to work more closely with industry in the development of new products, the production and use of which is beneficial to all concerned.

If I may draw an analogy, the new Environmental Contaminants Act is akin to the screening of new kinds of foods and new kinds of drugs. Industry is responsible not only for developing new ideas but also for vetting them ahead of time. Government will call for certain kinds of tests to be made and industry must make them. Industry must pay for the testing procedures and it must produce information on the environmental consequences of these ideas or products which government will be insisting upon before they become commercially marketable.

Our basic policy in so far as pollution is concerned is that the polluter shall pay. In this case the potential polluter will pay for the screening of his products. He will include the cost of carrying out the necessary tests in the cost of developing the new idea or product he hopes to sell at some future date. Environment Canada personnel will give the manufacturer certain guidelines. They will outline procedures and set standards. But most of the scientific and other staff needed in the screening process will be employed in the private sector. Most of the equipment and most of the testing will also be done there. Government will have a hand in this screening all right, but the federal taxpayer will not have to foot the bill. The company or industry in question will have to meet most, if not all, of the expenses involved in this process, the main purpose of which is to prevent pollution from occurring in the first place.

I said earlier that we have worked closely with industry in this connection. The reaction from trade associations and individual firms has been good. Chemical companies, in particular, would like to have their products screened before they go to the expense of manufacturing them on a large scale, because the losses involved in their being banned at a later date are bound to be large. An early warning system is best not only from the public's point of view but from a corporate point of view as well.

Environmental Contamination

What are we talking about here? We are talking mainly about artificial, man-made substances. We are talking about chemicals. We are talking about substances many of which have never existed on this planet before. We are talking about things which are either poisonous in nature or which do not readily break down in nature. If they are likely to accumulate in large quantities in the food chain and have ill effects not only on human beings but also on other forms of life, animal and vegetable, then they may be restricted or banned under our new Environmental Contaminants Act.

Perhaps I should go back a bit and give hon. members a few examples. Metallic mercury would have been dealt with directly under this legislation had it been in place in 1970 when we first found that this poisonous metal was escaping from our chlor-alkali plants. We used the Fisheries Act because mercury had a deleterious effect on fish. But mercury had a harmful effect on birdlife also and posed a serious threat to human health as well. As I say, we could have dealt with the so-called mercury crisis more effectively using Bill C-3, but the most effective approach would have been to screen mercury out of these various chemical processes ahead of time. We would have known about its effects in advance and we would have restricted or banned its use before, and not after, it got out into the air and into the local rivers and streams.

Phosphates in detergents constitute another case in point. When the Canada Water Act was being drafted—and that act deals primarily with the management of water in the physical sense of the word—a section was added to deal specifically with the phosphate question. We have cut back, progressively, on the phosphate content of detergents manufactured or imported for sale in this country. We have cut the content from 20 to 30 per cent to less than 5 per cent. This is in contrast to what has been done in the United States where, by and large, phosphates have not been limited and have had to be taken out at great expense to the taxpayer.

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We did a lot of testing along the way. We made sure that a figure of 5 per cent or less would have a minimum effect on water quality in Lake Erie, for example. We drew up protocols for testing and we set standards. We called the industry in and we insisted, using these special sections in the Canada Water Act, on its cutting down on the phosphate content in our Canadian soaps and detergents. This we did in order to prevent the unnecessary fertilization or enrichment of our inland waterways. We saved our municipalities a lot of money because we did not put these enriching substances into our sewers in the first place. I am told that the capital cost saving in this case is in the order of 50 per cent. It shows the economic benefit of following the prevention rather than the cure approach to contamination and protection of the environment in this country.

If we had had an Environmental Contaminants Act back in those days we would not have had to add a few special sections dealing with phosphates to the Canada Water Act. In future we will be able to use either of these pieces of legislation in dealing with phosphates, but there are many other substances which are harmful from an environmental point of view. They are not covered in the Canada