

QUALITY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

1973 Program Highlights

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ENVIRONMENTAL  
SCIENCES  
1973

1. Comprehensive studies of environmental problems of defined geographic regions.

(1) The Hudson Basin Project, begun June 1, 1973, now involves over 20 educational, research, and action institutions in compiling what is known of the area and assessing its adequacy for planning purposes. Rapid progress has been made in identifying significant knowledge gaps and developing a recommended agenda of research priorities and an effective mode of interinstitutional collaboration on solutions to the Basin's environmental problems. An economic, demographic, geographic, and institutional profile of the region has been completed, and ten primary-issue task groups have been appointed.

(2) Cornell University's Department of Rural Sociology and Rutgers University's Division of Urban Studies and Community Development have been granted aid to identify values, attitudes, and perceptions on environmental issues held by local leaders and decision-makers in the Hudson Basin Region. Development of an effective interviewing technique and identification of over 1,200 key "informants" are well under way.

(3) The officers have held exploratory discussions with key administrators of several western universities and research agencies on the need, opportunity, and feasibility of stimulating interinstitutional collaboration on such major environmental issues and problems as non-renewable natural resource management, land-use planning, and water-resource management. It is expected that at least one major meeting of such leaders and RF staff will be held during the next three months to define possible interinstitutional approaches to these problems.

2. Support of cooperative efforts by universities, state and federal agencies, and other organizations searching for solutions to specific regional or national environmental problems.

(1) A team of officers and outside consultants conducted a comprehensive review and evaluation of progress made in projects funded with the aid of major appropriations made in 1970-1971 to the University of California, Davis, the University of Michigan, Pennsylvania State University, and Utah State University. At the request of the four universities, a meeting of their principal staff, selected graduate students, and Foundation officers is being scheduled for early February to examine a series of propositions concerning institutional progress, capabilities, and difficulties in effecting interdisciplinary environmental research and education. A major publication, planned as a principal outcome of this evaluation, could be of direct value to universities in their continuing search for ways to foster and intensify interdisciplinary cooperation in the resolution of complex environmental problems.

(2) Programs which could have an impact on major regions of the U.S., as well as similar areas abroad, were assisted at the University of Florida and Michigan State University as these institutions seek alternative ways of sharply upgrading the quality of receiving waters through biological tertiary treatment of municipal waste waters.

3. Development of an understanding of environmentally significant alternatives in the management of major pollutants.

Three major program reviews were held in the New York offices this past year on alternative approaches to a reduction in the use of persistent, highly toxic, broad-spectrum pesticides. The first reviewed progress made in the discovery of biodegradable, non-polluting chemical alternatives to such products as DDT. It was reported that a number of new products have been discovered that are highly effective against target insects and rapidly biodegradable, with no accumulation in the food chains.

Exciting progress was also reported in work on juvenile hormones and in the development of plant resistance to insect attack.

4. Development of linkages among the world's institutions concerned with internationally important environmental problems.

(1) Following two international conferences at the Bellagio Study and Conference Center, a grant in aid was made to the newly established International Federation of Institutes of Advanced Study to enable it to define needs and obtain funding for cooperative projects on international water resources and on strategies for management, human settlements, and the impact of climate change on man.

(2) International cooperation on important environmental issues among nongovernmental institutions is to be stimulated by the International Institute for Environmental Affairs (aided by a Foundation grant) by means of workshops, seminars, and research by its staff. The Institute's activities are being concentrated on preparations for multi-institutional involvement in matters concerned with the law of the sea and population and human settlements - major issues around which governmental conferences, research projects, and action programs are being undertaken or planned.

5. Development of an understanding of the nature and sources of public perceptions of environmental problems.

(1) See 1(2) above.

(2) Modest support to Citizens for Clean Air, Inc., New York City, has made possible major beneficial public participation in the State Public Service Commission's inquiry into energy conservation measures. The P.S.C.'s year-long hearings are now expected to reflect more accurately, in regulatory and legislative policies, the public interests in critical energy problems and related problems of the environment.

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