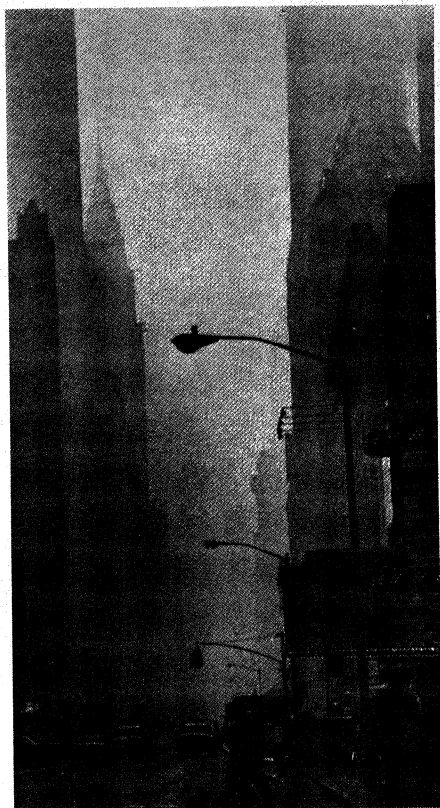


Airborne asphyxia—an international problem

Air pollution is no longer a minor inconvenience; it is a tangible, frightening, and intolerable situation that affects virtually every major industrial city in the United States and Europe

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Until quite recently, the smog in Los Angeles was the butt of every radio and television comedian. It was subjected to ridicule as the world's worst example of an out-of-control condition that was apparently without remedy.

But today the joke has gone sour. A recent—and disturbing—survey made by a special committee under the aegis of the New York City Council reveals that the type of air pollution—a dangerously high level of sulfur dioxide—in this huge metropolis, and particularly in the Borough of Manhattan, may be more hazardous to human life and health than that of Los Angeles.

It is estimated that the air is so foul over the island of Manhattan (see Fig. 1) that a monthly sootfall of more than 60 tons per square mile is commonplace during the winter. The City Council report alleges that most of the pollutants are belched out of the chimneys of industrial plants, electric utilities (see Figs. 2 and 3), and some 14 000 apartment house incinerators. Additional noxious fumes are spewed into the air from the tailpipes of thousands of motor vehicles that clog almost every square inch of city streets.

The commission's report asserts that breathing city air for one day would have the same effect on human lungs as inhaling two packs of cigarettes within the same time interval. So, as one wag put it: if one happens to be a habitual smoker in the two-pack-a-day category, and cannot shake the habit, it may be more healthful for one to give up breathing!

The sad story of air pollution, however, does not end with New York; Houston, Atlanta, Louisville, Chicago, St. Louis, Birmingham, and a host of other American and foreign cities are suffering the same atmospheric miseries (Fig. 4) in varying degrees and from various sources. In Germany, England, Belgium, France, and Luxembourg, where coal is the principal industrial fuel, the air pollution and smog problem is equally intense. Cities such as Essen, Dusseldorf, and other industrial centers in the Ruhr Valley are plagued by air

Fig. 1. "Darkness at high noon"—a view of 42nd Street in New York City under a blanket of heavy smog caused by a temperature inversion, on October 20, 1963..