

"The problem of sulphur pollution has grown (in New York) until now the measured concentrations of sulphur dioxide are higher than in any other major city in which such measurements are taken."

—V. G. MacKenzie,
Assistant Surgeon General,
Chief of the Air Pollution Division,
U.S. Public Health Service

city is quite willing to initiate court action to curb flagrant violations.

Los Angeles and New York. Reams of copy have been written over the past 20 years about the lethal smogs, principally caused by the fantastic motor vehicle population and domestic trash burners, in Los Angeles; and any further emphasis on the situation in this West Coast metropolis would seem boring and repetitious to the reader. Suffice to say that, in 1960, California passed a law requiring all new motor vehicles sold in the state to be equipped by the owners with the crankcase and tailpipe devices previously described. State officials estimate that more than 4 million California vehicles are now equipped with these devices and they are removing about 200 000 gallons of unburned gasoline from the atmosphere each day.

The air pollution situation in New York, however, is so far out of control that this writer could be panicked into leaving the city after reviewing his own copy. New York channels most of its air contamination problems into the municipal Department of Air Pollution Control, whose commissioner, Arthur J. Benline, frankly confesses that far too little money is appropriated either by the city or by the Federal Government to do an adequate job. During a recent television interview, Benline summed up the New York situation in two terse sentences: "The air over our city is helping our citizens to shuffle off this planet at a much higher rate than they would ordinarily go. Yet there has not been any overall demand from the public to clean up our dirty air." So, in the meanwhile, the city muddles through, and everyone hopes that, by some miracle, adequate corrective measures will be taken before any future prolonged temperature inversion produces the disaster that many health authorities fear.

The air pollution situation throughout most urban areas in the United States closely parallels the samplings just described in five major cities.

A utility answers its critics

At a recent hearing called by the Special Committee to Investigate Air Pollution (authorized by the New York City Council), the Consolidated Edison Company of New York replied to the Committee's accusation that Con Edison is one of the principal contributors to the air pollution problem. Otto W. Manz, Jr., the company's executive vice president, contended that the utility has done a conscientious job of providing adequate air pollution control equipment and devices in its city generating plants to minimize the emission of contaminants. In outlining future plans on the subject of air pollution con-

trol, Manz listed the following activities, presently under way, that will either decentralize electric generation to remote areas or significantly reduce objectionable stack emissions in city-located generating stations:

1. The construction of the Cornwall pumped-storage station, which will produce about 2000 MW of power, and will permit the retirement, or placement on cold standby, of about 750 MW of generating capacity that is presently being supplied by city steam-electric stations.
2. The possible substitution of more natural gas for coal as an alternative fuel for generating purposes.
3. The establishment of firm interconnections, by EHV transmission, with the CONEX group of New England utilities and with the Pennsylvania-New Jersey-Maryland (PJM) complex.

Manz believes that the ultimate answer to the problem of air pollution in metropolitan areas, insofar as power generation is concerned, is the use of nuclear energy. He cited the Indian Point nuclear generating station in suburban Westchester County that has been in operation for almost three years and is a firm and reliable producer of power for the Con Edison system.

The Con Edison spokesman sounded a warning note, however, on the subject of who will eventually pick up the tab for air pollution control measures. To quote from Manz' 8-page prepared statement:

"Our estimate is that on and after October 1, 1969, when the maximum sulfur content in these [coal] fuels will be 2.2 percent by weight, the additional annual cost of the fuels used by Con Edison and which will be passed on to the consumer could be as much as \$20 million."

Where do we go from here?

As one public health official bluntly put it: "Perhaps we are worrying about the wrong menace. Our urban civilization stands a much better chance of being suffocated by air pollution than being annihilated by atomic weapons."

From numerous surveys, it is obvious that the sources of air pollution are numerous and complex. There is no single group or interest toward whom we can point an accusing finger as being the sole villain of the drama. Until heavy industry, the utilities, car manufacturers, and the general public become totally aware of the truth about air pollution and the consequences of irresponsibility, the already intolerable situation will become impossible.

Piecemeal solutions are not the answer. A city committee cannot correct a situation—such as in Chicago and to some extent in New York—whose origins are interstate. Total and effective remedial action must be undertaken by joint commissions that represent municipal, state, Federal, and private interests.

Life depends upon the air we breathe.

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