

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN D. DINGELL, MEMBER OF
CONGRESS FROM MICHIGAN

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, for the record, my name is John D. Dingell; I am a Member of Congress from the Sixteenth District of Michigan. I wish to thank the Chair and Subcommittee for giving me this opportunity to testify in behalf of my bill, H.R. 7796.

Mr. Chairman, mankind is playing an extremely dangerous game with his environment. Unless we change our ways, mankind faces the very real possibility of extinction from misuse of environment.

For centuries, man has exploited and freely used the resources provided by his natural environment, unhampered by restrictions, secure in his belief that nature's bounty would last forever, heedless of any consequences in his headlong rush toward greater power and prosperity.

For the last two hundred years, Western man's attitude toward his environment has been characterized by an emphasis on economic motives. The industrial revolution which has provided us with the gift of technology also inaugurated specialization and division of labor as prerequisites for production for profit. Technology could be used profitably if production were specialized; indeed, the profit margin often depended on the technological capability of an enterprise. In turn, this idea produced improved technology with even greater capabilities. Our Nation's wealth was founded on technological progress spurred on by the profit motive.

However, this single-minded attention to production for profit resulted in severe social problems. Dislocation of the labor force, a highly mobile society, rapidly changing manpower needs, were some of them. More importantly, specialized production technology took no heed of the wastes created by it. A producer, intent on manufacturing a better mousetrap did not, in those days, need to concern himself with the pollutants and wastes his plant dumped indiscriminately into the air, the water, the surrounding countryside. This was someone else's problem. He did not need to concern himself with the noise his factory made, or the clogged roads caused by his delivery trucks. A coal mine operator did not worry about the scarred landscape left after a mine was abandoned, the severe erosion caused by rain water coursing down hills stripped of vegetation so access roads and auxiliary service plants for a mine could be installed and the mine operated at its full technological capability.

It is the force of these now accumulated changes, of unrestricted and uncoordinated manipulation and neglect inherited from past generations which is haunting us today. Not too long ago, Admiral Hyman Rickover stated:

"In the brief span of time—a century or so—that we have had a science-based wasted irreplaceable fuels and minerals and perpetrated incalculable and technology, what use have we made of it? We have multiplied inordinately, irreversible ecological damage. On the strength of our knowledge of nature, we have set ourselves above nature. We presume to change the natural environment for all the living creatures on this earth."

It is simple enough to detect the deterioration in our present natural environment. Air and water pollution, rising mountains of solid wastes being disposed of by antiquated methods, roads and highways choked by rapidly increasing numbers of automobiles, decayed neighborhoods, rising decibels of noise, disappearing open spaces, all represent a backdrop for American life in the second half of the 20th century. John Kenneth Galbraith provided us with a thumbnail sketch of this situation in his "Affluent Society":

"The family which takes its mauve and cerise, air-conditioned, power-steered, and power-braked automobile out for a tour passes through cities that are badly paved, made hideous by litter, blighted buildings, billboards, and posts for wires that should long since have been put underground * * * they picnic on exquisitely packaged foods from a portable icebox by a polluted stream and go on to spend the night at a park which is a menace to the public health and morals. Just before dozing off on an air mattress, beneath a nylon tent, amid the stench of decaying refuse, they may reflect vaguely on the curious unevenness of their blessings. Is this, indeed, the American genius?"

Our natural environment must maintain a constant, delicate balance. If any of its components are jarred by a pollutant, by the overenthusiastic use of a pesticide, by overcrowding, the dire effects will be many and varied on the whole environment. Our knowledge of the nature and extent of some of these effects is inadequate. We have been warned by scientists, citizens' organizations, public