

Institute on Toxic Substance Control

I am very pleased to participate in this second Government Institutes Toxic Substances Control Conference.

Meeting with groups such as this is a vital part of our effort to begin productive and open discussions on what the Environmental Protection Agency, in cooperation with industry, labor, environmentalists, and consumers, can do to improve the Nation's public health.

Today I want to talk about a recent development in Federal law that has important implications for public health and environmental quality.

The Toxic Substances Control Act, or TSCA, as it is known, was finally enacted on October 11, 1976, after some 5 years of Congressional debate. The passage of TSCA made the entire chemical industry subject to comprehensive Federal regulation for the first time. The Act gives EPA broad authority to identify and control harmful chemicals already being produced, as well as proposed new substances before they enter into commerce. It extends EPA's authority into every facet of industry: product development, testing, manufacturing, processing, distribution, and disposal. And because the Act treats importers of chemical substances as if they were domestic manufacturers, it also extends EPA's reach into the multi-billion dollar foreign chemical market.

One of the major concepts underlying TSCA is that the public interest requires EPA to have the capacity to act before harmful substances threaten health or the environment.

The President's Environmental Message to Congress last May stressed this very point. He said:

"The presence of toxic chemicals in our environment is one of the grimmest discoveries of the industrial era. Rather than coping with these hazards after they have escaped into our environment, our primary objective must be to prevent them from entering the environment in the first place."

TSCA gives us the tools to fashion this preventive approach. And none too soon—there is mounting evidence of the major role toxic chemicals play in the Nation's health problems. This is despite the admittedly dramatic improvements in public health that have been made over the last 100 years.

Let me give you some perspective:

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By 1900 the average for a woman in America was 50, while a man typically lived to age 46.

By 1950, life expectancy increased dramatically to 72 years for women and 68 years for men.

In the 27 years since, however, life expectancy has increased at a noticeably slower pace. Today, women can expect to reach age 76, and men, age 72.

This increase seems rather slight, given the huge expenditures on medical research, the sharp rise in medical costs, and the increased use of drugs and complicated life-saving technologies.

Some people argue that there is no warranty on human life that our bodies just have to wear out and die sometime, and that we have reached our "maximum life expectancy."

But the majority of experts in the area think otherwise. After all, there are countries where people live much longer than we do and where some of the diseases that kill most Americans are practically unheard of.

In fact, the more we learn about the environmental causes of health problems, the more reason we have to suspect that the traditional medical system has only a limited influence over disease and death rates. It is clear, for example, that people today get sick and die from different diseases than they did at the turn of this century.

Back then, tuberculosis, pneumonia, and other infectious diseases were the leading causes of death.

In contrast, heart disease and cancer—the fourth and eighth leading causes of death in 1900—now lead the list of killers. In 1900, these two diseases were responsible for 12 percent of deaths; today, cancer alone accounts for about 15 percent of deaths, and heart disease—our major health problem—kills half of the 2 million people who die each year in the United States.

Some increase in the cancer mortality rate may have been predicted on the basis of such demographic factors as population growth and the general aging of the population, and on the success of medicine in reducing the significance of infectious diseases. Another unquantifiable portion of this increase is undoubtedly traceable to improved reporting methods. But even after these influences have been taken into account, the death rate for cancer sharply exceeds predictions. We are left to conclude that life-limiting factors unknown in earlier times, or of less significance then, are playing a new and major role.

You probably have all read the estimates that 60 to 90 percent of cancer springs from such environmental causes as smoking, diet, and exposure to chemicals at work, in the air, and in the water. Health specialists further suspect that heart disease, stroke, miscarriages, birth defects, and neurological problems may also be influenced by chemicals in the environment.

Cancer kills more than 300,000 Americans each year. A million people are under treatment for the disease, and about 900,000 new cases are diagnosed annually. The American Cancer Society believes that one out of every four U.S. residents will eventually develop some form of cancer.

The economic costs of cancer are staggering. We spend about \$2 billion per year for hospital care of cancer victims and tens of billions per year for hospital care of cancer victims and tens of billions of dollars for cancer-related treatments. We annually lose about 2 million work years to cancer—costing the national economy and family income some \$12 billion. And of course the greatest "cost" of cancer—its toll on the victims and their loved ones and friends—cannot be measured.

In this context, the Toxic Substances Control Act is a major new weapon in our national strategy to promote health and to prevent disease. And we intend to use it . . . fully, wisely, and well.

One section of the Act may be of special interest to citizen environmental groups:

Congress recognized that public groups are typically at a great financial disadvantage if they want to participate in regulatory hearings. Accordingly, it stipulated in TSCA that EPA fund public participation in the regulation development process. In response to that authorization, we are setting up a pilot program to pay expert witness and attorney fees for public groups that want to participate in EPA's regulation of toxic substances.

NEW DAY BEGUN

by

Benjamin L. Hooks



In keeping with my call at the NAACP Annual Convention in St. Louis, Mo., last year for a major summit conference of black leaders, almost 1,000 spectators, delegates and members of the press met in Chicago from May 4-7 to help the veteran civil rights organization define current civil rights issues and strategies.

The NAACP National Leadership Summit Conference was different from our regular annual conventions and other conferences in one major respect.

It reached out in an all-encompassing scope for some of the nation's foremost professional, civic and political leaders who, because they have their own constituencies, do not normally work closely with the NAACP.

The vast majority, however, are lifetime supporters of the NAACP and gained prominence as a result of their close identity and work with the veteran civil rights organizations.

It was therefore no surprise to hear them repeat that "there is no other organization like the NAACP." This grand lady has been the mother of many other civil rights organizations and movements. Its strategies of legal and civic protests are now boldly used by scores of other groups and coalitions.

The ideas and knowledge that were contributed to the conference further showed the depth and breadth of expertise and influence that Black Americans now possess. What is needed, therefore, is a catalyst for transforming these vast pools of knowledge and experience into viable strategies for combating the horrendous social and economic problems that black people continue to face.

The role of an umbrella organization, and catalyst, is one that the NAACP has traditionally played. The most recent period of reference was the 50s through the 60s. Then, the NAACP performed such unsung functions as winning the suit in which the U.S. Supreme Court held in 1956 that segregation on travel within states was unconstitutional. This victory enabled Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. to triumph in the Montgomery bus boycott.

The NAACP also provided about \$1 million in bail for student demonstrators during the 60s. This money has never been retrieved. There were a host of other non-legal battles that the NAACP fought and won. Most notable were the passage of the civil rights acts, beginning with that of 1957.

But despite these and other triumphs, black people, by and large, are at a stand-still today. The victories of the 60s, the legal pronouncements and precedents have not realized equal opportunity for the masses of our people. The majority of blacks have not yet benefitted from the "deliberate" speed formulas for redressing long-standing grievances and outstanding legacies of discrimination.

Thirty percent of Black Americans live in "officially-defined" poverty. Black unemployment is twice as high as white unemployment. This has been the constant since World War II, in "good times" and bad. Black teen-age unemployment reached a phenomenal 39 percent this year. In some cities it soars to as high as 86 percent.

Having now therefore received the commitment of leaders to work with the NAACP in meeting the challenge ahead, the NAACP will at its annual convention in Portland in July, proceed to develop strategies with delegates from our 1,700 branches across the country for the acceleration of the struggle for full equality that lies ahead. We invite every American who supports this goal to support us by becoming a member of the NAACP.

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