



# World Ecology Report

Critical Issues in Health and the Environment

Knowledge brings new choices. Education brings new knowledge.

SPECIAL FOCUS:

## *Managing Suburban Sprawl in the 21st Century* (A Challenge for the New Millennium)

One of the themes covered during the Eighth International Conference on *Health and Environment: Global Partners for Global Solutions*, held on April 22 and 23, 1999, at the United Nations Headquarters was on sustainable and healthy towns, cities and buildings which we are publishing at this time.

Presented by Thomas Comitta,  
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**Traffic Congestion: A Consequence of Sprawl**

Over the next 20 to 40 years, the population of most municipalities and localities is projected to increase. With population growth comes more housing, more commercial development, more streets and roads, and more infrastructure. Because it is faster and cheaper to convert vacant and agricultural land, "greenfield" sites continue to be paved. New development often involves a single-use, like a shopping center, an office park, a residential subdivision, or an industrial park. All of these single-uses are typically spread out, and accessible only by motor vehicle.

Whatever happened to compact, mixed-use towns where you could walk to school or to work (or to the train station or bus stop to get to work)? Why do cities and towns

across America receive millions of dollars of highway construction funds, but not have significant mass transportation systems? Why do lending institutions provide construction financing for conventional suburban development, while considering it risky to finance mixed-use "village-scale" development? How can affordable housing and social equity be addressed while the most profitable production homebuilders continue to build, and sell, large homes on large

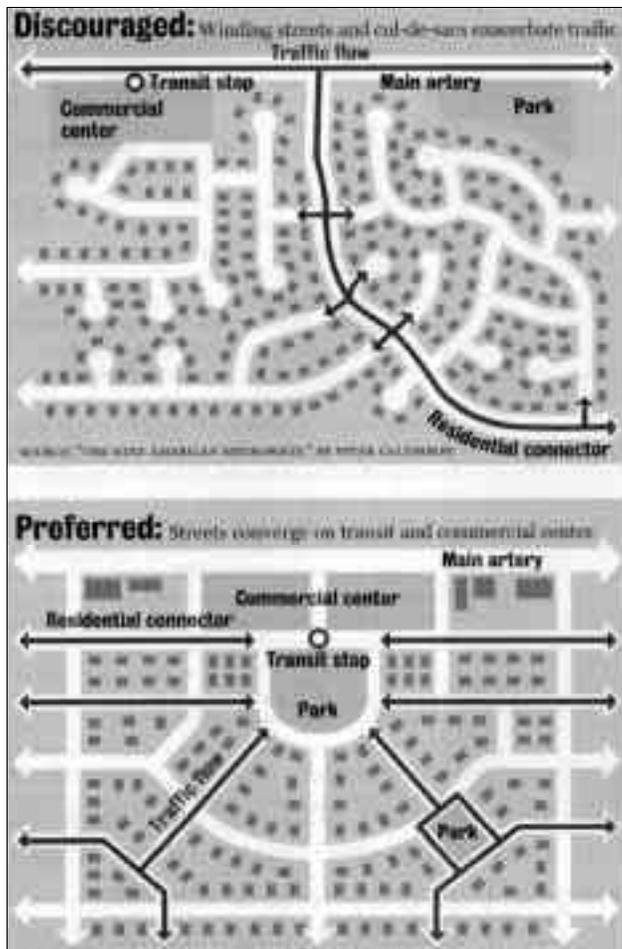
lots? Can city schools become as attractive as those in the suburbs?

Many of the questions and issues pertaining to suburban sprawl have evolved from the gradual "decanting" of city life in America from 1946 to 1964. During this period substantial population growth took place after World War II, aptly known as the "baby-boom". Low interest loans for new homes outside "blighted" areas attracted many former soldiers to raise their families in a new environment. The ex-urban exodus did not result in a new version of the mixed-use community which was left behind. Instead, it resulted in the creation of private enclaves of single-uses, predominantly residential developments, in what was previously the countryside. After Levittown, New York, and Levittown,

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SOURCE: Newsweek, May 15, 1995

Pennsylvania were built as single-use residential communities, the single-use shopping center was born. The shopping malls followed as regional attractions. The industrial park and the office campus completed the picture. All of these separate uses were assembled relatively quickly over a 20 to 40 year period and they were built primarily in the forests and the fields outside of the cities. The transformation occurred so quickly that only roads (not mass transportation systems) were built to connect the separated, sprawling development to the places that were left behind. Most new communities catered to the same socio-economic class. The public park in the city and the sidewalk to get there was not rebuilt in the suburban landscape. The front lawn and the driveway took precedence. The front porch where neighbors would meet and chat gave

way to the rear deck with gas grills. Bingo nights at the Fire Hall gave way to Trivial Pursuit in the family entertainment room. The Corner Store was banished through zoning regulations for separated land uses. The commercial strip center began to imprint the suburban crossroads where vehicles congregated.

The flight from the cities has been fueled by the expenditure of billions of dollars on the Interstate Highway System, starting in the 1960's. Many cities became by-passed, small towns became inaccessible, and new developments sprang up at exits along highways. Interstate highways also ripped through cities and severed stable neighborhoods. The whole framework of community building

changed from a neighborhood focus through the mid-1940's, to a car culture of separated uses since World War II.

A major reality of the flight from the cities, and the development of the suburban landscape, is the consumption of large quantities of land. After low density residential subdivisions are built, they are followed by shopping centers, industrial parks, and then the widening of country roads. In the past 30 years, the metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia area grew from approximately 60 miles north-south to 110 miles north-south. Phoenix, Arizona has sprawled out to reach Tucson. Between 1970 and 1990 in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, metropolitan area, the population increased by 2.8%, yet the land consumed for residential and related growth involved a 33% increase. This

is a dramatic contrast with the well-planned Portland, Oregon Metro Area where population grew by approximately 49% over 20 years, but land consumption only involved a 2% increase. Growth in the Portland area occurs within a planned zone defined as an Urban Growth Boundary that is serviced by a major mass transportation system. If the development pace continues in the Philadelphia area, wall-to-wall development could connect the Delaware River in Philadelphia County to the Susquehanna River in Lancaster County. The historical landscape at Valley Forge National Historical Park and some patches of Amish Farmland in Lancaster County could become oases surrounded by big-box discount stores, shopping malls, housing developments, and highways. This potential future for the Pennsylvania landscape to be consumed by a suburban sprawl pattern of development is becoming a reality. In December 1999, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released a report which indicated that from 1992 to 1997, 1.1 million acres of land were converted to development in Pennsylvania. This was the second highest in the nation, placing it just behind Texas where 1.2 million acres of farmland and forests were lost in the five year period. Nationally more than 3 million acres a year have been converted from open space to suburban development from 1992 to 1997, compared to 1.4 million acres a year from 1982 to 1992. Overall, the USDA's report has underscored the need for more federal involvement in the fight against sprawl according to Betsy Garside, spokeswoman for the American Farmland Trust. According to Vice-President Al Gore, "These new figures confirm what communities across America already know—too much of our precious open space is being gobbled up by sprawl." Gore, who has made suburban development an issue in his presidential campaign, said, "We need to help communities grow in ways that work" (His web site is designed to do just that—

www.liveablecommunities.gov)

The bulldozing of land for housing, shopping centers, and office parks has driven up land values and provided a windfall to farmers who have chosen to sell out. Although the farmers and developers will profit from suburban development, traffic congestion will continue to increase travel time, commuting, and local air pollution.

A principal problem with the late 20th century prosperity is that a dysfunctional pattern of community has evolved. The charming landscape of the New England village as a development typology has given way to a boundless continuum of subdivisions and projects. Instead of names like Stockbridge conjuring up an image of Norman Rockwell, we now have private enclaves with names like "Whispering Glen at Snowy Owl Woods" (where no glen, or woods, or owls, have survived, and in some cases never existed in the first place).

What have people been saying about suburban sprawl? How do they feel about the cost of sprawl to the taxpayers? The major problems typically described with suburban sprawl include:

- a loss of open space and natural areas, such as woodlands and wetlands;
- a loss of agricultural land which could provide valuable food and employment opportunity;
- abandoned taxpayer investment in the city;
- traffic congestion and longer commutes;
- an auto dependency to drive from single-use to single-use;
- excessive paving, whereby for every one motorist, at least 1,000 square feet of paved parking is built (200 square feet for each vehicle at home, work, shopping, worship and recreation);
- a lack of cohesive, mixed use, walkable neighborhoods, and no neighborhood commerce center with civic amenities; and
- an economic decline in existing down towns.

From a "global" perspective, there are three overarching themes that appear to be missing from the sprawled suburban landscape:

- a holistic planning program which results in the creation of a place, such as a village, or town or city;
- an effective program for infill development whereby small vacant sites in an existing town or city are developed, or whereby appropriate redevelopment takes place; and
- an awareness of the adverse environmental impacts that are created when a healthy natural environment is converted to a degraded environment, also resulting in the loss of heritage landscapes.

In order for Town Planning to make a comeback, so that towns, villages, and other places are re-created similar to those of pre-World War II America, a major paradigm shift needs to occur. New programs need to be created to deal with the building of streets and highways, the building of mass transportation systems, the financing of multiple dwelling types in a compact

neighborhood setting, and the integration of land uses through changed zoning laws. A holistic planning program that addresses physical place-making, a return to walkable neighborhoods, and enhanced livability, could help to reshape and re-image the suburbs so that a more sustainable pattern of community evolves.

In order for effective urban infill and redevelopment to take place, policy plans must be rewritten to stimulate and reward the reuse of vacant parcels in towns and cities. In many cases, if a section of an existing town were destroyed by fire, it would be impossible to rebuild it under most ordinances and codes that have surprisingly been rewritten over the past 40 years to mimic the suburbs. These codes require wide streets with no on-street parking, large lots, deep setbacks, and cul-de-sac (versus through streets). There is a tremendous amount of capacity in existing towns and cities to accommodate more growth and development. Often, however, instead of developing a site that already has street access and



**SOURCE:** "Perspecta 30—Settlement Patterns", *The Yale University Architecture Journal*, editors Louise Harpman and Evan M. Supcoff, *The MIT Press*, Cambridge, 1999

## "Green Architecture for the 21st Century, Manhattan's Green Giant"

*Presented by Mr. Robert Fox, President, Fox & Fowle, during the Eighth International Conference on Health and Environment: Global Partners for Global Solutions, April 22, 1999 at the United Nations Headquarters.*

In the 1980's, New York City saw one of the greatest building booms in its history. During that period, Fox & Fowle designed about 40 major high rise buildings and about half of them were built.

What did these projects have in common? First, they were well designed. Second, they all complied with the New York State Energy Code, enacted after the gasoline crisis of the 1970's. That meant, among other requirements, that we had to reduce window sizes to about 50% of the exterior wall, and we had to limit the amount of fresh air to 5 cubic feet per minute (CFM). Obviously if one reduces the amount of cold air entering the building in the winter and the amount of hot, humid air entering the building in the summer, less energy will be used. Third, they looked good, were very efficient in terms of ratio of core areas to usable areas and core areas to wall distances. Fourth, without exceptions all were successful real estate ventures for our clients.

The problem was the indoor environmental quality (IEQ), which is more than just air quality. In the last 10 years we have learned a lot about IEQ which is comprised on the following:

- Daylight: Many studies have been done by major companies, proving that access to daylight is a critical factor for human health and productivity. Sitting near a window or being able to see out of a window or seeing sky through a skylight is very important. No one has ever told me that they preferred to work in a space with no windows and no view.

- Lighting: The days of 2X2 or 2X4 fluorescent lights mounted in the ceiling are over. In almost all cases they produce glare on computer monitors and almost everyone uses a computer as an integral part of doing their job these days.

- Air: 5 cubic feet per minute (CFM) is just barely enough fresh air to keep someone alive—and resulted in what we now refer to as the "sick building syndrome". Fresh air, properly filtered, and of the right temperature is critical not only

for health but for productivity.

- Carcinogen Free Environment: Almost every piece of furniture, carpet, wall covering and paint contains volatile organic compounds (VOC). They are carcinogens. One of the worst offenders is formaldehyde.

In 1996, our firm was beginning work on the 1,600,000 square feet (SF) Conde Nast Building in Times Square for the Durst Organization, run by the 3rd generation of this creative real estate family. We committed to design and build an environmentally responsible high rise building—what some of you have come to know as a green building.

Our efforts fell into 2 basic categories—energy conservation and indoor environmental quality. Additionally, we have special recycling facilities in the building and are using a high percentage of recycled materials and have devised new ways to maintain our building with environmentally friendly materials. Energy conservation and IEQ were our main focus, however.

For efficient energy usage we used special glass, a very well insulated curtain wall, and an extremely energy efficient equipment and lighting. We also have integrated photovoltaic panels in our facade to produce about 1% of the building's electricity and we even have 2 fuel cells to generate our own electricity for about 5% of the building. We used a Department of Energy (DOE) computer program called DOE-2 to prove that our base building would use 20% less energy than a similar building, and if the tenants conformed to our guidelines with their interiors, the savings would be at least 40%. Saving that much energy—almost \$2,000,000 per year—is very commendable, but the most important result of our work was the indoor environmental quality.

We designed windows that extend from about 2 ft. above the floor right up to the 9 ft. ceiling. This lets in a lot more natural light and allows it to penetrate much further into the interior. We advocated to the tenants and their architects that they do not load up the perimeter with offices but instead keep it open so all could share in the daylight. If they had to put offices at the perimeter, we suggested glass walls to achieve the same effect. We also strongly recommended to the tenants that they use direct/indirect lighting, which bounces most of the light off the ceiling with only a small fraction going in a downward direction. This dramatically reduces glare on the computer monitors and also gives a more even level of lighting in the space.

We provided to 25 cubic feet per minute (CFM) of fresh air—5 times the New York



State Energy Code and are filtering that air with an 85% filtration system instead of the 35% filters used in all other office buildings. Which air would you rather breathe—the air that filters out 85% of the impurities, or what you are now experiencing—a 35% filter—which is probably not working even at that level because it has not been changed or cleaned recently? I assure you the air quality at 4 Times Square is much better than the air quality in most of your homes.

We gave guidelines to our tenants to illustrate products that are made with no or minimum VOC content. We also provided enough extra fresh air so we could flush out any 4 floors in the building at any time with 100% outside air to remove any lingering construction odors or possible VOC's. We also have a built-in monitoring system above the ceiling to examine the air on a quarterly basis for unhealthy chemicals.

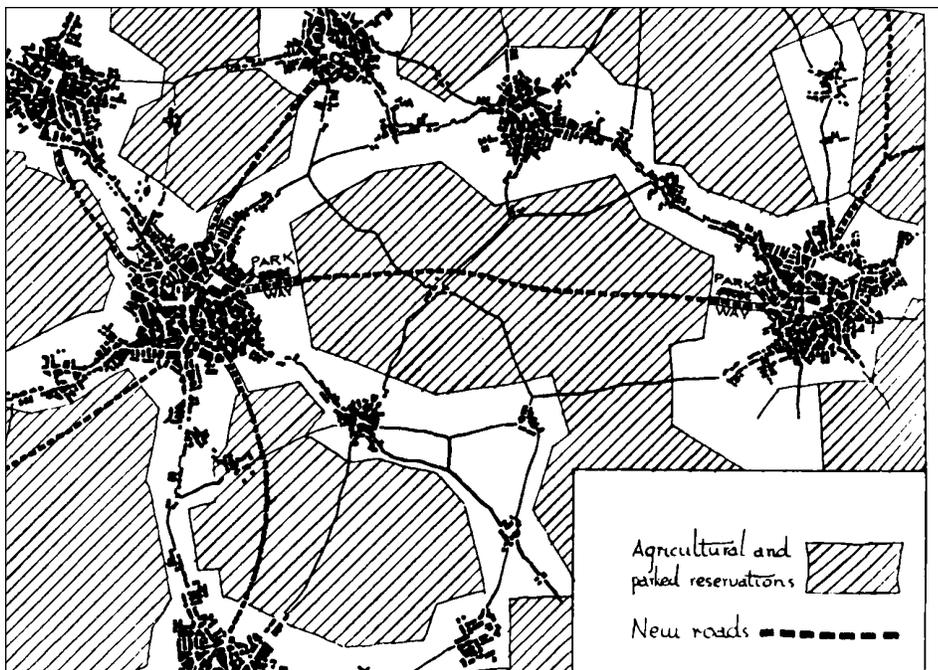
The above is very important because health and productivity are very critical issues. When the corporate decision makers truly understand them, and how they affect the work place, they will insist that their real estate, certainly any new buildings, are environmentally responsible.

Lets look first at productivity and what it really means. We fully expect that at 4 Times Square our tenants Conde Nast and Skadden Arps will see a productivity increase of at least 5% and probably 10%. If a typical employee makes \$75,000 per year and occupies 200 sq. ft., the cost per square foot per year per employee is \$375. If the productivity is increased by 10% that equals \$37.50 per/SQ which means our tenants are occupying the building practically rent free. That 10% increase for a 1.6 million sq. ft. building is equal to approximately 60 million dollars per year.

The health issue is also very clear. If the building is free of VOC's and has very clean fresh air, the occupants will be healthier. They will not be passing germs to each other, they will not be breathing in known carcinogens, and they will feel better. There is also little opportunity for litigation coming from sick employees, or from building owners or tenants.

I know that in order to be successful in the next millennium, my firm will have to maintain our leaderships position of protecting the public welfare by doing environmentally responsible buildings that will provide a healthy and productive environment for its users. We are committed to investing the time and resources this requires. We truly believe that green design is a good design.

Finally, the best news—if it is done right—if a building is truly environmentally responsible—it will cost less to build.



#### Well planned towns and countryside

**SOURCE:** "The Search for Environment—The Garden City Before and After", by Walter L. Creese, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1992

utilities, "greenfield" sites outside of the town are chosen for new development. Another emerging possibility is the redevelopment of the "brownfield" site, where former industrial, commercial or residential buildings have been demolished and are waiting to be redeveloped. Many localities have introduced incentives and funding sources to redevelop the "brownfield" site so that "greenfield" sites are preserved. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a grant program to promote the re-use of the "brownfield" sites through their Smart Growth Network ([www.smartgrowth.org](http://www.smartgrowth.org)).

In order for the natural and cultural environment to survive as healthy ecosystems, more compact development must occur. The alteration, degradation, or destruction of flood plains, wetlands, woodlands, steep slopes, and historical landscapes not only diminishes the vast open spaces that originally attract the suburbanites. The loss of the natural habitat also degrades the quality of life in a community. A good large scale example of a province where the towns survive in

a compact arrangement, and the countryside functions as a healthy environment, is Nova Scotia, Canada, just far enough away from megalopolis that it has not yet been converted to a sprawled pattern of development.

Although the problems with suburban sprawl may get worse over the next 40 years, before widespread improvements are noticeable, there are numerous initiatives that are underway to begin to turn things around. First of all, the popular press is covering community development and suburban sprawl issues more than ever before. The daily newspaper and the weekly magazine report regularly on the issues. Traffic congestion seems to get the most coverage, followed by loss of the "sense of place" or "sense of community" when open space and farmland are lost, followed by the loss of cultural institutions like the small town hardware store or grocery. Big-box discount superstores, shopping malls or their expansion, large out-of-context drugstore chains, and massive single-use housing developments are reported daily, usually at the expense

of the small downtown, the heritage farm on the edge of town, or the forest outside of town. A landscape formed over hundreds and thousands of years has given way to a quick profit scheme that changes the complexion of Mother Nature in just a few years.

Numerous regional, community, civic and non-profit groups are beginning to become engaged in public education programs related to smart growth, sustainable development, compact development, livable communities, community place-making, civic pride, and other planning and design alternatives to conventional suburban development. National, regional and state programs are gaining attention and support, and are enabling consumers to re-think their lifestyle choices and preferences, and to save money on the costs of everyday living.

Professional City and Town Planners are recommending: (1) Urban Growth Boundaries (UGB) modeled after many western European cities; (2) the use of Conservation Easements; (3) Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) where the development rights from agricultural "sending areas" are transferred to "receiving areas" where community infrastructure already exists; (4) Transit Oriented Development (TOD) where new development and redevelopment is anchored by a transit station; and (5) Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) where mixed-use, small lot, integrated development is focused on recreating the type of neighborhood traditionally built in the United States from 1900 to 1942.

A relatively new group of City and Town Planners, Architects and Landscape Architects, are working with Municipalities and Developers to re-think the suburbs. A group known as the "Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) formed in 1992 to help re-think possibilities for growth and change. The CNU activists have been helping Developers of residential and commercial projects to re-shape the suburbs. The New Urbanism is a fresh look at how to assemble and

reassemble communities according to a set of principles. The New Urbanism movement has emerged as a reaction to the failure of current development practices to offer a sustainable pattern of land uses and socially diverse neighborhoods, along with integrated networks of streets and open spaces. Its Charter addresses the disinvestment in cities, the spread of placeless sprawl, environmental deterioration, loss of agricultural lands, and erosion of the heritage of the country. CNU stands for the restoration of existing urban centers and towns within coherent metropolitan regions, and the reconfiguration of sprawling suburbs into communities of real neighborhoods, and most importantly the conservation of natural environments.

As the public education process continues through the programs of governmental agencies, non-profit groups, and the private sector, the economy grows. More people are moving into metropolitan areas because there are more jobs and a low unemployment rate. With the coming of the new millennium, the time is now ripe for the private sector, the public sector, and the developers of suburban sprawl to try to find a common ground balancing environmental values with economic needs.

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## FOOD FOR THOUGHT: *Reinventing Cities*

The world's cities take up just 2 percent of the Earth's surface, yet account for roughly 78 percent of the carbon emissions from human activities, 76 percent of industrial wood use, and 60 percent of the water tapped for use by people, reports a new analysis of the global environmental impact of cities from the Worldwatch Institute. "These figures suggest that the struggle to achieve an environmentally sustainable economy will be won or lost in the world's urban areas," said Molly O'Meara, author of *Reinventing Cities for People and the Planet*, Worldwatch Paper 147 (June 1999). "Urban systems are undermining the planet's health and failing to provide decent living conditions for millions of people."

London, for example, now requires roughly 58 times its land area just to supply its residents with food and timber. Meeting the needs of everyone in the world in the same way that the needs of Londoners are met would require at least three more Earths. Today, at least 600 million city dwellers in the developing world do not have adequate shelter and 1.1 billion choke on unhealthy air. Polluted air in 36 Indian cities killed some 52,000 people in 1995, a 28 percent increase from the early 1990s. China reported at least 3 million deaths from toxic urban air between 1994 and 1996.

Rapid urbanization in the twentieth century has magnified the environmental impact of cities. In 1900, only 160 million people, one tenth of the world's population, were urbanites. By 2006, in contrast, half the world (3.2 billion people) will live in urban area—a 20-fold increase in numbers. Because of inadequate systems and

poor planning, cities are disproportionately driving global warming, deforestation, and increasing water scarcity. Changes in six areas—water, waste, food, energy, transportation, and land use—are needed to make cities better for people and the planet.

One of the guiding principles will be to reform urban systems so that they mimic the metabolism of nature.

- **Curitiba, Brazil** has coordinated transportation and land use to support efficient public buses. Although the city has one car for every three people, two thirds of all trips in the city are made by bus. Curitiba also has devised a unique way to promote sanitation while boosting nutrition. Since 1991, the city has taken the money it would otherwise pay waste collectors to fetch garbage from slums, and has spent it on food from local farms. For every bag of waste brought to a waste collection site, a low-income family gets a bag of locally grown vegetables and fruits.

- **Copenhagen, Denmark** has taken a lead in turning waste into resource. “Gray water” from kitchens and compost from household waste nourish food-producing gardens, while hot water left over from power generation heats nearly 70 percent of the city’s buildings. Also a leader in low-energy transport, Copenhagen maintains a fleet of bikes for public use that is financed through advertising on the wheel surfaces and bicycle frames.

- **Chattanooga, Tennessee**, a leader in recycling and electric buses, has transformed itself from the most polluted city in the United States to one of the most livable in less than three decades. A proposed zero-waste park, which would include factories, retail stores, and residences, would expand the city’s metamorphosis. Underground tunnels would link some 30 buildings, 10 of which exist already, to share heating, cooling, wastes, and industrial water supplies.

Powerful economic and political forces prevent such urban innovations from spreading around the world more



**Recycling and reuse of waste materials provides one solution. Western Europe’s municipal rubbish is recycled, reused or used to provide energy. U.S. reduces their waste by between 20 and 70 per cent. Germany recycles more than two-thirds of its paper; Japan recycles more than half.**

*SOURCE: UNEP, Our Planet, Vol. 10, No. 4, 1999*

quickly. A key problem, argues O’Meara, is that national governments curtail the fiscal autonomy of cities. With greater control over their own revenue sources, cities could place higher fees on water, trash collection, and road use; and levy taxes on fossil fuels in order to bring needed funds to city bank accounts and provide incentives for green technologies and jobs.

- **Boston, Massachusetts**, have reduced total water demand by 24 percent since 1987 through a conservation strategy that has included higher prices. Today, the city has the water it needs for a third to half the cost of diverting two large rivers.

- **Bogor, Indonesia** installed water meters and raised fees in 1988. Households began to conserve, allowing the utility to connect more families to the system without increasing the amount of water used.

Financial levers can also tame automobile traffic. For more than 20 years, downtown-bound drivers in Singapore

have paid a fee that rises during rush hour; since 1998, the fee has been automatically deducted from an electronic card. And in the United States, government policies are just beginning to target parking subsidies, worth \$31.5 billion a year.

Some local governments are removing subsidies for extension of sewer and roads—or charging fees to install them—to stem the runaway development that paves over more than 1 million hectares of farmland each year in the United States. This disincentive is the cornerstone of the state of Maryland’s “Smart Growth” initiative to reduce sprawl.

The misdirection of money is not the only obstacle in the way of building better cities. “The people and businesses committed to current wasteful patterns of development constitute a potent political constituency,” says O’Meara. “With better information, citizens can form a counterweight to powerful interest groups.”

New information technologies hold promise for political change. Geographic information systems (GIS) can be used to create maps that highlight urban problems. In Maryland, a recent study used a GIS to produce a video that showed Baltimore and Washington merging into one massive agglomeration. Maryland’s governor credited the video with helping him win legislative approval for his anti-sprawl initiatives.

Also, various networks are speeding cooperation between officials in different urban settings. City-toxicity exchanges are not as politically charged as negotiations among nations, so local authorities are often able to move faster than their national governments can to combat global environmental problems. In the 1980s, cities in the United States and Canada passed ordinances banning ozone depleting chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), well before the 1996 deadline for eliminating CFCs set by an international treaty.

*SOURCE: Worldwatch briefing “Reinventing Cities,” [www.worldwatch.org/alerts990619.html](http://www.worldwatch.org/alerts990619.html)*

## HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

# *Women's Issues in Occupational Health and the New Millennium*

At five o'clock in the afternoon on March 25, 1911, the workers at The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York were preparing to go home. This factory was one of the largest garment shops in New York City, and the workers were crowded with great piles of cloth in loft rooms that were served with inadequate exits. A fire suddenly broke out on the eighth floor, which quickly turned into an inferno. The screaming workers, mostly young women, ran to the exits, to the elevators on one side, and the stairway on the other. The stairway door was locked. Eventually some of the women escaped to the street, others made their way to the roof. Many were overcome by smoke and died at their machines, and others leaped through the windows of the eighth, ninth, and tenth floor to their death. A total of 146 workers perished as a result of this fire, all but 21 of them

were women. The owners and management of the factory were men. None actually operated sewing machines, and none were present at the time of the fire.

Factory work was not the only profession that was dangerous to women in the early part of the twentieth century. In 1925, Britton and Bollman determined that 2.2% of all nurses in Chicago had tuberculosis. This rate was only exceeded by telephone operators and seamstresses. Beginning in 1924, Heimbeck studied a series of nursing students in Oslo. He reported one study of nursing students where 220 were tuberculin negative on admission to nursing school, and found that 210 (95%) of them converted to positive by graduation. A series of studies performed in the United States indicated similar high rates of tuberculin skin test conversion in nursing schools, hospitals, and sani-

tariums. In the 1930's, a study performed by Metropolitan Life Insurance indicated that nurses were 500 times more likely than the general public to develop tuberculosis. While the morbidity and mortality associated with tuberculosis has decreased, hospitals, offices and factories are still locations associated with a significant amount of occupational illness in women.

Historically, the career choices of women have been dictated by sex role socialization. Studies indicate that a female has grasped the essentials of her sex role by the age of three, and subsequent experience of family, school, church, community, and peer groups, as well as the media, have caused women to assume many characteristics which are adverse to achievement at work. Boys are expected to be more aggressive and competitive than girls and girls are more compliant and expected to be more timid than boys. Studies of school age children have shown that for girls, popularity is more important than academic success or achievement. This can not be explained by the theory that clever girls are less popular, because in fact research indicates that in girls, brainpower is closely correlated with social success. Success and achievement were considered masculine virtues, and these values have been perpetuated throughout the educational system. Furthermore, women have always had the additional burden of childcare. Consequently, many women have made the conscious choice to accept jobs with low pay, dull work, and lack of advancement in return for the freedom to enter and leave the job market as needed.

Women have made substantial progress in obtaining managerial and professional positions and in 1995



**Industrial fumes damaging our health**

**SOURCE:** UNEP, *Our Planet*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 1999

account for 48% of all managerial and executive positions. However, despite the substantial progress achieved, women still remain crowded in relatively few professions. In 1997, the six most prevalent positions for women include: school teachers, secretaries, cashiers, manager/administrators, nurses, and sales positions. These jobs employ more than 25% of all working women. Additionally, women continue to comprise the overwhelming majority of the following occupations: hair dressing/cosmetology, typists, cleaner/servants, childcare workers, and dental assistants. Experts in the Department of Labor indicate that women choose these professions because there tends to be less skills obsolescence for workers who leave and re-enter the labor force. It has also been argued that educational commitment for these fields is less and workers can have more time at home to assume domestic responsibilities. Data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) showed that for all men only 1.6 percent of all potential work years was spent away from work, while for women workers, 14.7% of all potential work years were spent away from paid work. This impacts upon the ability of women to achieve seniority and job security in a given career, as well as influencing career choices for women. The prevalence of women in certain sectors leads to increased risk for developing certain occupational illnesses and injuries, and increased morbidity due to delayed diagnosis and treatment.

This phenomenon is illustrated particularly in the health care industry. Statistics indicate that more than 80% of health care workers are women, however only 24% of female health care workers are in health diagnostic positions, i.e. physicians, dentists, psychologists. NIOSH has indicated that musculoskeletal injuries are the most common type of work related illness/injury. The highest incidence rates of work-related injuries and illnesses from overexertion occur in workers in nursing and personal care

## Consumer Products Containing Hazardous Wastes

Many consumer products contain hazardous chemicals. Such 'household chemical wastes' are increasing. There is little information about their extent, but The Netherlands is estimated to produce 41,000 tonnes of them a year.

They are particularly important because they are usually disposed of as normal rubbish, without the special precautions laid down for hazardous wastes. Special care needs to be taken in disposing of them. Some countries segregate them from other household waste before sending it for disposal. In other countries municipalities may make special arrangements to receive them, or retailers may take them back for disposal.

Plastics: organochlorine compounds, organic solvents in PVC

Pesticides: organochlorine compounds, organophosphate compounds

Medicines: organic solvents and residues, traces of heavy metals

Paints: heavy metals, pigments, solvents, organic residues

Batteries: heavy metals

Oil, Gasoline (and other petroleum products): oil, phenols and other organic compounds, heavy metals, ammonia, salt acids, caustics

Metals: heavy metals, pigments, abrasive plating salts, oils, phenols

Leathers: heavy metals

Textiles: heavy metal dyes, organochlorine compounds.

**SOURCE:** UNEP, *Our Planet*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 1999

facilities. Additionally, injury to the wrist and hand caused by repetitive motion (i.e. carpal tunnel syndrome) is reported 1.7 times more often by working women compared to working men. Other potential health problems which occur as a result of exposures in health care facilities include microbial contamination from blood borne viruses, tuberculosis, and bacteria; indoor air quality issues; and dermatitis. Indoor air is a problem in office buildings as well as medical facilities, but medical facilities have unique exposures because of the disinfectant chemicals used to prevent exposure to viruses and tuberculosis. While health care workers, both male and female continue to be exposed to potentially contagious infections, other conditions cause the majority of lost time injuries in this population. Several recent cases seen in our practice illustrate the conditions which are especially common in working women, and some of the

reasons for their severity.

A recent case of carpal tunnel syndrome was referred to the employee health clinic. The patient is a 45 year old woman who was working as a housekeeper in a clinical facility. She had been working in the facility for 6 years, and had no prior history of illness or injury prior to work at this job. Over a period of two years, she developed worsening wrist pain and numbness, particularly with mopping floors and exerting pressure upon the mop. This woman was reluctant to report this problem to her supervisor as she felt that she would lose her job. She felt that this was the only job that she was qualified to perform as she was not fluent in the English language. She continued to perform her job and in fact received several commendations for her work, until the muscle weakness and wrist pain became so severe that she could no longer perform simple household tasks, as well as her job.

*"Keeping the environment and people safe from harmful chemicals means using cleaner production."* —Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director, UNEP

Her medical evaluation was consistent with severe carpal tunnel syndrome, and she was referred for surgery.

Another employee who performs ultrasound examinations on pregnant women reported to the employee health clinic for evaluation. This patient was diagnosed with shoulder bursitis and cervical disc disease. Further evaluation of this unit indicated that nine of the eleven technicians performing this job had similar, but less severe injuries. After a detailed work site evaluation, modifications were suggested for this site including adjustable equipment and work practice controls. Unfortunately, the index case continues to have injuries which may result in a permanent disability. It is noted that several physicians work in this area. Only one physician exhibited similar musculoskeletal findings. This physician spent the bulk of his career doing research requiring extensive use of this technique. The other physicians spent no more than two to four hours per week performing this procedure, and spent the majority of their working hours examining patients or performing surgical procedures. The technicians were not able to vary their work schedule, and usually worked forty-hour work weeks.

A third situation involved nurses working in a poorly ventilated outpatient facility. The index case was referred to our facility because she developed occupational asthma. A site investigation revealed the presence of glutaraldehyde in open baths used for sterilizing medical instruments. Formaldehyde was also present and used as a preservative for certain types of specimens. Evaluation of the nurses at this facility indicated the majority

of nurses experienced at least some manifestations of sick building syndrome including mucous membrane irritation (eye, nose or throat), central nervous system symptoms (headaches, fatigue, or lethargy), chest tightness, or skin irritation. It is noted that very few of the physicians experienced these symptoms. Further evaluation of the site indicated that nurses were crowded in small offices with four to eight nurses per room, and were in central offices with no windows. Carbon dioxide levels in these offices exceeded the ambient air. At least ten nurses, all women, in this cohort developed clinically significant respiratory illnesses which continued to worsen at their workplace. Most of the women did not pursue other job opportunities as they did not want to lose their medical benefits.

These difficult situations are by no means confined to the health care industry. Repetitive motion injuries continue to occur in clerical workers in office settings at rates which exceed the rate seen in managers who do not have the prolonged periods of video display terminal work. Cosmetologists are exposed to a variety of chemicals accounting for skin and respiratory illnesses. Cleaning people in all facilities are continually exposed to both awkward repetitive motions, as well as irritating and corrosive chemicals. Women are often unable to leave work settings until the work related medical illness becomes so severe that they suffer major disabilities or require emergency surgery.

In the new millennium, women need to be empowered to make choices which allow them to work efficiently and safely. If a work situation is dangerous or undesirable, changes to the

work place need to be requested and implemented. While the modern workplace is rarely as dangerous as the Triangle Shirtwaist Company, women workers need to be educated in the best ways to protect their health in the modern workplace. Women working as nurses, teachers, and secretaries should take pride in their professional status, and not accept unsafe working conditions. Education in early childhood needs to emphasize girls more risk taking for girls and should reward some of the aggressive behavior that is considered praiseworthy in boys. Boys should be encouraged to be more sensitive and be more concerned about many of the social issues which were traditionally more important to girls. Women should receive proper training which would qualify them to assume more management roles, and success for men should not always be equated with achieving the highest management status and should also include parenting and other social interactions. This effort would result in a society where there is more equality in the workplace and in the home, and where health and safety are emphasized for both women and men.

By Iris G. Udasin, M.D., Associate Professor of Environmental and Community Medicine, Director of Employee Health for UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, New Jersey

**SOURCES:** Last, John and Wallace, Robert B., editors, *Maxcy-Rosenau Public Health and Preventive Medicine*, 13th edition, Appleton and Lange, East Norwalk, Connecticut, 1992; Rom, William, editor, *Environmental and Occupational Medicine*, 3rd edition, Lippincott-Raven, Philadelphia, 1998; Sepkowitz, Kent, "Tuberculosis and the health care worker: a historical perspective," *Ann Int Med*, 120:71-79, 1994; Howe, Irving, *World of our Fathers*; Collier, Helen, *Counseling Women: A Guide for Therapists*, McMillen, New York, 1982; Moir, Anne, and Jessel, David, *Brain Sex*, Dell, New York, 1992.

[www.earthprint.com](http://www.earthprint.com)

### Hot Web Sites

[www.UNEP.org](http://www.UNEP.org)

**Climate change and its impacts on tourism:** <http://www.wwf-uk.org/news/news99.htm>

**Eco-sense: mitigation of global warming:**

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/nonfram/260899/detOP104.htm>

**A review of climate change and ozone depletion:** <http://www.globalchange.org>

**Country analysis briefs:** <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/contents.html>



## DID YOU KNOW?

■ The Netherlands has set new targets for renewable energy use which envisages green power sources providing 10 percent of the nations' total energy needs by 2020.

**SOURCE:** *Daily Electric Power News*, 12-08-99

■ At the beginning of December 1999, Ukraine's troubled Chernobyl nuclear power plant shut down its only remaining reactor because of a cooling system leak just a few days after restarting it from an earlier shutdown, according to authorities. The last working reactor in the Chernobyl power plant, scene of the world's worst nuclear disaster in 1986, was back in use days after a dangerous malfunction had forced it to shut down. However, since Ukraine relies heavily on nuclear power as the source for electricity Chernobyl remains an important generating plant. In late November, the country cut electricity supplies to 15,600 clients, mostly small businesses, over mounting payment arrears for consumed power, according to the Energy Ministry. In mid-December, the European Union agreed to give 400 million euros (dollars) towards an international fund to pay for two new reactors to replace the decaying Chernobyl nuclear power station, according to Russia's Interfax news agency.

**SOURCE:** *Daily Electric Power News*, 12-02-99; 12-03-99; 12-7-99; and 12-16-99.

■ Vice President Al Gore accuses opponents of the Kyoto Protocol on Global Climate Change of Exploiting the American public's poor understanding of science. He writes: "As science and technology transform our world, citizens need basic scientific literacy to make intelligent decisions about the myriad complex issues facing this

nation and the world....The world's leading climate scientists tell us that we are lading the atmosphere with potent greenhouse gases that will raise temperatures and change precipitation patterns around the world.... The political and technical challenges of such an unprecedented global agreement are daunting enough. But industry opponents of the Kyoto protocol are also attempting to undermine public support for the protocol by funding a massive public relations campaign attacking the findings of the world's expert climate scientists."

**SOURCE:** [www.globalchange.org](http://www.globalchange.org)

■ Worldwide, there are 8 million people in prison, so the US, with 4% of world population, holds 25% of all the world's prisoners. For an American born this year, the chance of spending some part of their life in prison is one in 20; for black Americans, it is one in 4.

**SOURCE:** *Rachel's Environment & Health Weekly* #680, December 16, 1999.

■ California Governor Gray Davis and state environmental officials honored PG&E Corporation's energy utility unit with the Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award for the utility's work in restoring the habitat of chinook salmon.

**SOURCE:** *Daily Electric Power News*, 12-13-99

■ Lead poisoning continues to be one of the world's most pervasively debilitating diseases. The World Health Organization has found that all urban children in developing countries under two years of age, and more than 80 percent of those between the ages of three and five, are suspected to have blood lead levels exceeding international health standards. Lead exposures can adversely affect everyone, but special populations such as children, pregnant women, and men and women of reproductive age are particularly vulnerable to lead's harmful effects. Even at very low levels, lead poisoning in children can cause developmental disabilities, hyperactivity, impaired growth, hearing loss, blood diseases, behavior problems, reduced attention span, and decreased productivity. Effects on adults include high blood pressure, kidney disease, and impaired fertility.

**SOURCE:** David F. Hales, Director of the Global Environment, Bureau for the US Agency for International Development.

## AIDS and Southern Africa's Economic Development

Southern Africa is faced with a huge challenge of bringing the AIDS pandemic under control in order to boost its economic development. At present, despite efforts by governments, community-based organizations and others to curb the spread of the disease, southern Africa remains the hardest hit. In Botswana, Namibia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, current estimates indicate that nearly a quarter of the population in these countries—between 20 percent and 26 percent of people aged between 15 and 49—are living with HIV or AIDS. According to the US news magazine, *Time*, South Africa's Department of Health estimates that at least 20 percent of the workforce will be infected by the virus by next year. Over the next three years, the annual death toll will be 250,000 leaving behind almost 600,000 orphans. The disease is projected to cut average life expectancy by 20 years, and to shrink economic growth by two percent. According to the former South African Health Minister, Nkosazana Zuma, the country has the fastest growing number of HIV patients with close to 50,000 people acquiring the virus every month. In Zimbabwe, one of the worst affected countries, it is estimated that 1400 people die of the disease every week. The epidemic is mainly affecting the economically active age group. Countries affected will lose large amounts of money in training the unskilled workers in an effort to find suitable replacements for the skilled men and women who are dying. In Zimbabwe, training costs in 1993 were estimated at US\$2,500 per worker, or less than six months of the average worker's income. The figure will certainly rise within the next five years as more and more people die. The cost of training professionals is immense and each expert who succumbs to Aids is a loss to the nation's development plans. The country's economy can ill afford the loss of such professionals. The 1998 SADC Regional Human Development Report revealed that life expectancy in Zambia dropped from 54 years in 1990 to 43 years in 1995 and is likely to fall to 38 years by the turn of the century.

**SOURCE:** Shamlal Puri and Winet Mutimbe, *Newslink Africa*, 30 August 1999.

## CHERNOBYL UPDATE

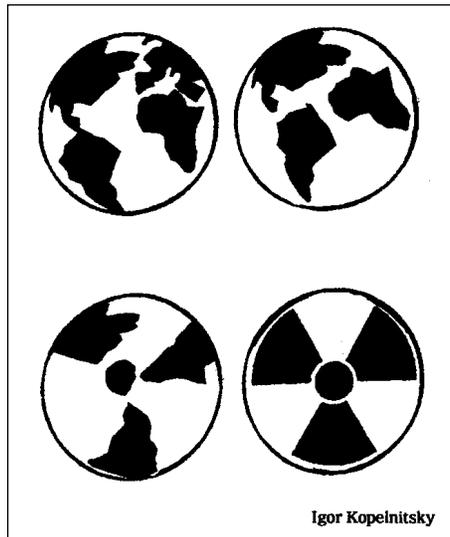
*Who is Responsible for Nuclear Power?*

Otto Hahn and Fritz Strassmann, two German chemists who discovered nuclear fission at the end of 1938, were not searching for methods to create an element of vast destructive possibilities. They were learning how atoms were organized and discovered the mechanism for releasing nuclear energy in quantity. Soon afterward, the world of physicists understood that, after forty years of basic research into the mysteries of radioactivity, a process existed that could release the enormous energies latent in matter that Albert Einstein had quantified in his famous formula  $E=mc^2$ . Thus, a kilogram of uranium (smaller than a golf ball) could explode with energy equivalent to twenty thousand tons of TNT. This was the beginning of the nuclear age—Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Chernobyl—leashing untold consequences of the atom's destructive power. In light of this power let loose on the world by physicists, the Nobel Prize winning physicist and campaigner against nuclear weapons proliferation, Sir Joseph Rotblat, has considered the practicality of a "A Hippocratic Oath for Scientists."

On October 13, 1995, Professor Rotblat and the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs received the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to diminish the role of nuclear arms in international politics and their work towards nuclear disarmament.\* In his acceptance speech, Prof. Rotblat called upon scientists to focus their attention on their personal responsibility for the fruits of their scientific discoveries. He stated, "When it comes to nuclear weapons...it is the man in the laboratory who at the start proposes that for this or that arcane reason it would be useful to improve an old or to devise a new nuclear warhead. It is...the technician, not the commander in the field, who is at the heart of the arms race." Rotblat pointed to the few "Dr Strangeloves," among the world's physi-

cists responsible in his estimation for sustaining the arms race. "They did great damage to the image of science."

If scientists recognized the potential impact of their research on society, such damage in the future could be avoided. Focusing on the responsibility scientific researchers have for the results of their discoveries, Rotblat challenged the notion that science is value neutral. The results affect society to move in some direction. In addition, research topics are themselves not neutral, emanating from particular societal concerns such



as winning the Cold War. This Cold War mentality, argued Rotblat, prevails although the Soviet Union has dissolved.

Scientific research is not only subjective—that is not neutral—it is also immoral when the scientist ignores the potential results of research. Rotblat proposed that not only should the physicist consider whether he or she can conduct certain research and develop particular technologies, but more importantly whether the research should be done. Once information resulting from the research is available, there is little control over its use. The moral dimension of scientific research can lead to issues

that ultimately beg the question of individual responsibility. Can Hahn or Strassman be held responsible for the US dropping the atom bomb on Japan in 1945? Their discovery of nuclear fission occurred during experiments unrelated to atomic power. Should they not have conducted those experiments? Or, should the information about fission not have been published?

Rotblat advocates an ethical code—a sort of Hippocratic oath—for scientists. Although the value of such an oath may be essentially symbolic as it is for physicians, it encourages engagement with the ethical questions of responsibility for the consequences of scientific research and discovery. The Hippocratic oath, which physicians take upon graduation from medical school, reflects ethical principles of the ancient Greek physician, Hypocrites, that medicine should build the patient's strength and that no harm should be done to the individual.

Various formulations of oaths for physicists and other scientists have been proposed, however, Rotblatt advocates the pledge initiated by the United States Student Pugwash Group. It reads:

"I promise to work for a better world, where science and technology are used in socially responsible ways. I will not use my education for any purpose intended to harm human beings or the environment. Throughout my career, I will consider the ethical implications of my work before I take action. While the demands placed upon me may be great, I sign this declaration because I recognize that individual responsibility is the first step on the path to peace."

The same research that led to the development of nuclear weapons produced nuclear energy to power the world's economies. Thus, the moral dilemma of the nuclear weapons researchers holds for those who further develop nuclear power altogether.

**SOURCES:** \*Nobel Prize Committee, 1995, Rotblat, Joseph, 1995 Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech.

## Voices

■ World Information Transfer's Ninth International Conference on Health and Environment: Global Partners for Global Solutions on the theme of "Solutions for the Next Millennium" will take place on April 27 and 28, 2000, United Nations Headquarters, New York. Further information will be available in the next issues of the World Ecology Report as well as on WIT's web site: [www.worldinfo.org](http://www.worldinfo.org)

■ The updated Humanity Development Library CD-ROM, noted in the Fall 1999 issue of the *World Ecology Report*, has been updated to include additional information and to be more even more user friendly. This digital library aims to "help solve poverty, to increase human potential and to provide education to all." The complete low-cost CD-ROM library now consists of 3,000 essential books and solutions from UN resources in the public domain. The goal of the non-profit Humanity Libraries Project is to provide persons or groups in the developing world, owning a PC/CD-ROM set, access to a complete basic library at very low cost. This CD-ROM set contains most multidisciplinary solutions, know-how and ideas needed to help solve problems from building water pumps to ideas on eradicating poverty. The individual, group or agency with the software is expected to become a local focus point for human development information. Portions of the library are now available in French and Spanish. The entire CD Rom is in English. The Humanity Development Library is created by the NGO Global Help Projects in cooperation with many partners, including World Information Transfer, World Resources Institute and the United Nations University. For additional information contact the Project's developer, Dr. Michel Loots, Humanity Libraries Project, Global Help Projects vzw - HumanityCD bvba, Oosterveldlaan 196 B-2610 Antwerpen - Belgium; Tel 32-3-448.05.54; Fax 32-3-449.75.74; E-mail: [humanity@globalprojects.org](mailto:humanity@globalprojects.org)  
<http://www.oneworld.org/globalprojects>

■ A great many articles on the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle this past December are available. Rather than adding to the debate, *World Ecology Report* editors chose to recommend an article published by the World Watch Institute before the so-called

"Battle in Seattle" that focuses attention on the growing importance of NGO's to affect international agreements. Private citizens throughout the world organizing themselves into non-governmental organizations are exerting "unprecedented" influence on the policy decisions of governments and business. There are estimated two million non-governmental organizations in the US alone 70% of which have been formed in the last thirty years. Over the same time period, the number of international non-governmental organizations has jumped from about 5000 groups to approximately 20,000 currently operating. Governments once resistant to citizens pressure groups respond to the coordinated activism of local and international non-governmental organizations as in the successful independence struggle of East Timor. Non-governmental organizations are solving social and economic problems through new technique, rather than waiting for government support. The Grameen Bank based in Bangladesh is one of the successful examples demonstrating that rural poverty can be changed by providing poor women with small amounts of capital allowing people to start businesses and ultimately support themselves. Additional information is available from *World Watch* magazine, November/December 1999, issue and from the World Watch web site: [www.worldwatch.org](http://www.worldwatch.org).

■ The "Health Training" website is an internet-based inventory providing comprehensive information on postgraduate training and further education opportunities in the field of International Health, including poverty-related health problems in low and middle income countries. It includes the promotion of health, prevention and treatment of diseases, and rehabilitation. International health integrates a number of disciplines including anthropology, biology, clinical and nursing sciences, demography, economics, epidemiology, nutrition, psychology, and tropical medicine. "Health Training" is based on an online inventory provided since 1997 by Medicus Mundi Switzerland. the Swiss network of organizations dealing with International Health. The website administrators: Medicus Mundi Switzerland (MMS)—Phone +41/61/383 18 10; Fax +41/61/383 18 11; E-mail: [info@medicusmundi.ch](mailto:info@medicusmundi.ch)  
Health Training Website—  
<http://www.healthtraining.org>  
MMS Website—  
<http://www.medicusmundi.ch>

■ International Health Awareness Network (IHAN) is hosting a program on January 18, 2000 on AIDS Orphans. The program will feature the film on AIDS shot in South Africa by Ms. Rory Kennedy as well as notable speakers on the topic. The venue is the United Nations Dag Hammarskjold Auditorium, from 10 am-1 pm. For further information, contact Dr. Mahnaz Sarachi at IHAN, 908-598-0080 (telephone) or e-mail [SRoshan105@aol.com](mailto:SRoshan105@aol.com)

■ To stay updated on the forthcoming UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) use the Commission's web site [www.un.org/esa/sustdev](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev)

The thematic focus of CSD 2000 will be on land resources management, sustainable agriculture, trade, economic growth, investment, finance, forests, consumption and production patterns, poverty and lastly capacity building, as a crosscutting concern. The CSD Ad hoc Working Group on Finance, Trade, Investment and Economic Growth will convene at UN headquarters in New York, February 22-25, 2000.

■ The Singapore National Committee of UNIFEM has announced the creation of Southeast Asia's first ethical equities fund. It will invest only in companies that have socially responsible policies toward women. Proceeds from the investments, which potentially will top US \$35 million, will benefit UNIFEM's work on behalf of women in Southeast Asia's developing countries. The new equities fund is a joint effort between the National Committee for UNIFEM in Singapore and United Overseas Bank's Asset Management (UOBAM) unit, which currently manages \$3 billion in assets and is the largest unit trust fund manager in Singapore. UOBAM will contribute a third of its annual fund management fee, based on the number of investments, to UNIFEM. UOBAM will survey Asian companies on their hiring practices, female representation on their boards of directors and childcare facilities. The National Committee for UNIFEM in Singapore will regularly audit the fund portfolio. For more information, please contact Rita Gibbons, UNIFEM Public Affairs Specialist, at [rita.gibbons@undp.org](mailto:rita.gibbons@undp.org) Online information about UNIFEM is available from *UNIFEM Currents*, a monthly electronic newsletter of United Nations Development Fund For Women (UNIFEM). December 1999; <http://www.undp.org/unifem/curr1299.html>

**Point of View**, *cont'd from back page*

bottom line as transnational corporations. All profit-making enterprises are businesses, regardless of size and product. The not-for-profit, volunteer sector works on a different bottom line, that is, improving the human condition. If the Secretary General's partnership initiatives with business and civil society are to be clearly understood and unbiased to the long standing not-for-profit NGOs, then they have to be distinguished from for-profit civil society. Obscuring a clear delineation between the not-for-profit and for-profit segments of civil society sets the stage for the diminishing traditional partnership between the UN and not-for-profit NGOs.

Defining not-for-profit NGOs so as to obscure their significance is a subtle form of restriction. Lately, physical restrictions for NGOs have also intensified. To enter the UN building in New York, NGO representatives, having been singled out as a heightened security risk, must pass through metal detectors and scanners similar to those used at airports. Although the regulation is unevenly applied at certain entrances and at certain times, it nevertheless reveals a new perspective towards the UN's traditional affiliates. The scanners see through briefcases and handbags, presumably to detect weapons and small explosives. However, common items including, jewelry, small Swiss Army knives, and even the UN grounds pass itself, sets these devices ringing. NGOs are expected to leave with UN Security those possessions that look suspicious to the untrained or overzealous guard.

Our investigation of incidences when weapons or explosives have been brought into the UN produced no evidence that NGO representatives have ever perpetrated such a crime. At the same time, members of UN missions, temporary as well as permanent, and UN staff, undergo no such scrutiny on entering the New York

headquarters. In fact, anyone other than NGOs, some members of the press, and the general public—all of whom pass through the detectors—can carry concealed arms or explosives into the Secretariat building undetected. Some years ago, someone drove small explosives aimed at the Arab newspaper *El Hayat* into the UN's underground garage. NGOs do not have access to this garage

Singling out NGOs as a particular security risk in the absence of evidence suggests that NGOs have become an unwelcome presence at the UN. UN security guards implement the new regulations in ways that humiliate and embarrass the many professionals who compose the NGO community, including those whose organizations have won Nobel Peace Prizes. NGOs have been able to discuss with ambassadors important policy issues in the conference rooms and corridors of the UN. Now some of those meeting places are off limits to all but a very small number of not-for-profit representatives.

The NGOs in Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council rely on information and ideas—that is on words not weapons—to make their points to ECOSOC's functional commissions, which include Sustainable Development, Social Development, Status of Women, and Human Rights. NGOs aim to speak truth to power. The participation of the NGOs who work on behalf of the United Nation's humanitarian goals has had a democratizing effect on the entire UN system for over 50 years. Restricting this sector and attempting to obscure its significance impedes the democratic functioning of the United Nations. Combined with the heightened involvement of the non-governmental business sector, the UN reorients itself away from its traditional humanitarian bottom line to the business bottom line of profit. Indeed, who did the Secretary General welcome into what kind of an international "home"?

**World Information Transfer  
MISSION STATEMENT**

*We have not inherited the world from our forefathers...we have borrowed it from our children.* —Kashmiri Proverb

World Information Transfer, Inc. (WIT) is a not-for-profit (501c3) non-governmental organization in consultative status with the United Nations, promoting environmental health and literacy.

In 1987, inspired by the Chernobyl nuclear tragedy, WIT was formed in recognition of the pressing need to provide accurate actionable information about our deteriorating global environment and its effect on human health to opinion leaders and concerned citizens around the world.

WIT exercises its mandate through:

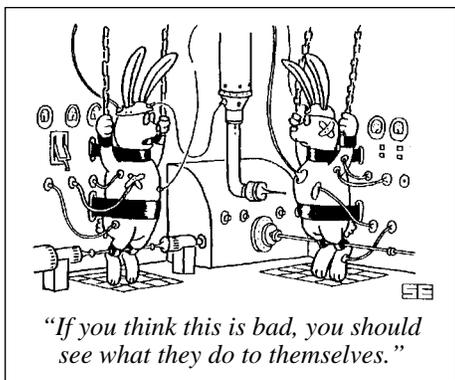
1. The publication of the *World Ecology Report*, a quarterly digest of critical issues in health and environment, published in five languages and distributed to opinion leaders around the world, and for free in developing countries.

2. Our annual conference on *Health and the Environment: Global Partners For Global Solutions* held at United Nations headquarters in New York since 1992. The world's leading authorities in the field of environmental medicine share their latest findings and discuss possible solutions with leaders in governments, business, organizations and the media.

3. Since 1995, WIT has been providing and promoting humanitarian relief to areas devastated by environmental degradation. Supplies and equipment have been sent to hospitals and orphanages in areas contaminated by the Chernobyl fallout. This program has been rapidly expanding since its inception.

4. Centers for Health & Environment providing centralized scientific data pertaining to health and sustainability issues. The objective of the Centers is to provide continuous monitoring, ongoing research, education and implementation of corrective programs. The first center was opened in Kiev in 1992 and moved to Lviv in 1996. The second center opened in Beirut, Lebanon in 1997.

WIT currently operates from headquarters in New York City with regional representative offices in Australia, Austria, Canada, China, Colombia, Egypt, Germany, Holland, Honduras, India, Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, Switzerland, Ukraine. WIT is on the Executive Board of CONGO (Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations) and is vice-chair on the DPI/NGO Executive Committee.



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WIT is a non-profit, international, non-governmental organization, in consultative status with the United Nations, dedicated to forging understanding of the relationship between health and environment among opinion leaders and concerned citizens around the world. You can help us with your letters, your time, and/or your donations.

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## POINT OF VIEW:

# *The Waning Not-For-Profit Influence at the UN*

“Welcome to UN Headquarters; welcome home.” These were the inviting words spoken by United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, to the 51st Annual DPI-NGO Conference in New York, on September 14, 1998.

The Secretary General's words welcoming the NGOs home to the UN were most assuredly sincere, yet the world wide expanding influence of NGOs invites fear and disdain among governments expressed in the form of subtle and not so subtle restrictions at the UN. We wonder into what kind of “home” we are welcomed.

The number of non-governmental organizations seeking affiliation to the UN has grown throughout this decade as has NGO influence, especially since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992. This conference brought non-governmental organizations into the international debate and negotiations on environment and development. While some governmental committees and commissions increasingly involve NGOs, for example the Commission on Sustainable Development, others all too often curtail NGO participation and worse. Secretary General Annan recognized the growing dilemma facing NGOs at the UN. He confirmed that, “You have

been censored...denied access to information; harassed, jailed and exiled; tortured and murdered.” The Secretary General called for partnerships, “that will allow democratic participation in decision-making; that will enable Governments to back down from their mistakes; that will enable UN fact-finding missions and other mechanisms to operate with integrity.”

In addition to establishing more effective relationships with NGOs, the UN has also embarked on an effort to create partnerships with non-governmental “business”. This endeavor seems to have the potential for strengthening the work of the UN. However, from the point of view of the not-for-profit sector, the relationship with the UN becomes more perplexing.

The language adopted to define non-governmental organizations distinguished these groups from governments. For some time now, the term non-governmental organization, at least as old as the UN itself, has been used interchangeably with the newer phrase, civil society. Initially, civil society included all groups within society except government, thus the not-for-profit, volunteer sector and the business spheres belonged to the same large category of civil rather than

governmental (political) society. At the same time, the not-for-profit NGOs found themselves under different scrutiny at the UN than their civil society cousins. For example, the Economic and Social Council, ECOSOC, has a committee on NGOs that accredits organizations, reviews these organizations after four years, and is now considering a “code of conduct” to be applied to NGOs only—not to other members of civil society.

Within UN parlance, the term civil society has recently been refined to distinguish business from civil society. As recently reflected in the UN web site ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org)), business is no longer categorized with civil society. Business has been separated, if not elevated, to its own classification. Currently, the UN web site defines civil society as including, “Youth Groups, Academia, United Nations Associations, Sports and Culture.” Universities and sports teams obviously engage in profit making enterprise. Size and profit might distinguish them from transnational corporations and so might product. Yet, private universities, and many of the institutions of culture, like television and theater, share the same for-profit

*Point of View, cont'd on page 14*

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*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has.”*

Margaret Mead

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