

The Global AIDS Situation as of November 1987*

The numbers of reported cases of AIDS and countries reporting AIDS have continued to increase dramatically. As of 11 November 1987, 64,488 AIDS cases have been officially reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) from 127 countries. However, this number represents only a fraction of the total cases of AIDS to date, which are estimated to be between 100,000 and 150,000. WHO estimates that between 5 and 10 million persons may be currently infected with human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV—the virus which causes AIDS. By 1991, WHO estimates that at least one million new cases of AIDS could develop in people already infected with HIV.

AIDS has been reported from every part of the world. The largest number of cases, 43,533, have been reported in the United States, where the disease was first recognized in 1981. In 40 other countries in the Americas, a total of 6,259 cases have been reported. In the Americas, Europe, and Australia, most AIDS cases occur among young, 20–49 years-old homosexual or bisexual men and intravenous drug-users. However, the estimate of the proportion of cases of AIDS acquired through heterosexual contact has increased from 1% to approximately 4%. The United States Public Health Service estimates that, by 1991, 270,000 cases of AIDS will have occurred in the United States of America alone—nearly five times the total number of cases reported world-wide so far.

In Europe, where 27 countries have reported 7,512 AIDS cases, most countries are now considered to be facing an epidemic. WHO estimates that 500,000 to one million persons in Europe are infected with the AIDS virus. Highest *per caput* cases of AIDS are found in Switzerland, Denmark, France, and Belgium. WHO estimates that there will be 25,000 new cases of AIDS in Europe by the end of 1988.

In Africa, the number of countries reporting AIDS to WHO has increased substantially in the past year. As of 11 November, 37 African nations had reported 6,298 cases of AIDS. Major factors of HIV-spread in Africa are heterosexual transmission, transfusions with unscreened blood, use of unsterilized needles or syringes, and mother-to-child transmission. The last is a significant source of infection, especially in areas where 5–10% of pregnant women have been recorded as HIV-seropositive.

In Asia, 18 countries have reported 208 cases of AIDS. Many of those cases are linked to persons who have been in areas where AIDS is more prevalent than in the countries concerned. Oceania (including Australia and New Zealand) has reported 678 cases.

Despite considerable research, a vaccine may be farther away than was thought a year ago. In addition, a cure for AIDS is still lacking. In the absence of a vaccine, or effective, curative treatment, education and information on how to avoid AIDS remains the key to controlling its spread.

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* See also the more detailed 'AIDS—An International Perspective', by Drs Fakhry Assaad & Jonathan M. Mann, published in our Summer issue of this year (*Environmental Conservation*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 174–6, 1987).—Ed.

The Virginia Environmental Endowment*

The Virginia Environmental Endowment (VEE), formed ten years ago in the aftermath of the Kepone insecticide pollution of the James River in Virginia, is an object lesson in how to turn pollution events into a positive force for environmental protection.

Since its founding in 1977 with an \$8 millions contribution from Allied Chemical Corporation as part of the settlement of the United States Government's case against Allied, VEE has spent approximately \$8 millions and still has assets of \$18 millions to continue its work. A further settlement—of \$1 million from the FMC Corporation in 1981 as a result of a guilty plea agreement over the discharge of carbon tetrachloride into the Kanawha River of the neighbouring State of West Virginia—has enabled VEE to expand its work beyond the borders of the State of Virginia.

As a result of grants made by VEE, new institutions have been created, new research on the effects of toxic substances on human health and the environment has been conducted, and numerous educational, legal, and commu-

nity-based, activities have taken place. The following is an abbreviated list of some of these accomplishments:

* The Institute for Environmental Negotiation was created at the University of Virginia. The Institute is a mediation centre for revolving complex environmental disputes that has successfully mediated a variety of situations over the last five years.

* The Division of Clinical Toxicology and Environmental Medicine was established at Virginia Commonwealth University's Medical College of Virginia. This institution performs advanced medical research on toxics, educates physicians, and treats patients with disorders of toxic origin.

* The Water Education Institute was set up at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, to provide intensive and extensive educational programmes on water resource management.

* The Environment Defense Fund was able to establish a Virginia office to provide legal and scientific expertise to Virginians.

* The Virginia Toxics Roundtable, a group of chemical industry and environmental leaders, was established, and played a major role in developing Virginia's new hazardous-waste facility siting law.

* Indicating impressive advances since we published an account of VEE in 1983 (*Environmental Conservation*, Vol. 10, No 3, pp. 166–7).—Ed.

* The Kentucky Governmental Accountability Project has been able to provide legislative and judicial representation to Kentucky citizens.

* The Cincinnati Roundtable was established to get local business and environmental leaders to work cooperatively on water quality problems in that Ohio River city.

* VEE grants to Virginia Commonwealth University—Medical College of Virginia and Virginia's Health Department established the direction, purpose, and meaning, of all future research on the insecticide Kepone.

* A new curriculum guide for secondary school students about toxics and their environmental effects was developed and distributed.

* The Student Environmental Health project was established in Virginia to recruit university students to assist local community groups' work on environmental problems.

In addition, a number of new projects show promise of future beneficial results. Examples include:

1) An environmental centre is being developed on Belle Isle in the James River at Richmond.

2) A comprehensive assessment of all water and wastewater treatment needs is being conducted for Virginia.

3) A multi-jurisdictional cooperative effort has begun to study the water quality of Smith Mountain Lake in Virginia, towards developing ways to control the adverse effects of development around the Lake.

4) A major cooperative venture involving the local government, a private conservation organization, and research workers from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, is developing a shoreline protection plan for Richmond County, Virginia.

5) The US Nature Conservancy is being funded to develop conservation plans for the Eastern Shore of Virginia, and to develop a voluntary registration programme for landowners to protect their valuable habitats and endangered species.

6) A programme to help local governments to address the increasingly difficult matter of safely disposing of hazardous wastes is under way.

7) The Ohio River Basin Research and Educational Consortium has been formed to coordinate water-quality work in that region.

Other organizations that VEE helps to support include major US conservation groups such as the Izaak Walton League, the National Audubon Society, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Southern Environmental Law Center, and the Student Conservation Association.

A new major focus for VEE is the protection and management of Chesapeake Bay, one of the world's great estuaries. VEE is funding projects that address scientific research and citizen participation in developing public policy (both federal and state) to protect the Bay, and is promoting new partnerships among business, conservation, academic, and local government, organizations. In addition, VEE continues its interests in toxics, water quality, land-use, waste management, and conflict resolution.

In its first decade, through its judicious grants, VEE has made a significant contribution to protecting and enhancing the quality of the environment for the benefit of the people. The accomplishments of its first decade signal a forecast for this unique organization's work to continue to benefit all of us in the region, and may well point the way to such activities which if possible should, and probably could, be widely emulated elsewhere.

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Evaluating Last Year's Congress of the International Society of Soil Science

Following our report on the above events in the Conference & Meetings section of this Journal (*Environmental Conservation*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 182–3), we would like to emphasize some outstanding points as follows: Firstly, the Congress demonstrated not decreasing, but rather increasing, attention of the world community of soil scientists to the fundamental ideas of Dokuchaev's pedology and to its genetical doctrines in particular. An intention to consider natural and anthropogenic soil phenomena and processes on the basis of their genesis, development, and evolution, with due account of ecological conditions or factors of soil formation, was evident in many of the reports presented to the Congress. Naturally, this was especially evident in the reports of the ISSS commission which deals specifically with the problems of soil genesis, and particularly in the reports on soil classification problems. However, much the same is true in respect of the reports concerning some other problems of soil science.

At the same time, it is necessary to mention the lack of general theories of soil formation and functioning among the materials presented to the Congress. The problem of general soil classification of the world still remained unsolved, despite the efforts undertaken.

Secondly, in the majority of the more substantial reports there appeared a clear tendency for a transfer from 'descriptive' to 'managerial' science—to attempts at uncover-

ing the inside mechanisms and the dynamics (regimes) of soil formation and functioning as the basis of soil management—or the purpose of creation of soils with improved features. This is particularly characteristic of the scientists of the highly industrialized countries, where the aspects of technologies tend to be most at the forefront of scientific studies.

Thirdly, a tendency should be noted towards a change of emphasis of soil studies in different directions in different groups of countries.

Alongside their intensive studies of the management of soil processes and increasing attention to problems of soil pollution, decreasing efforts to investigate the problems of soil fertility are characteristic of the developed, industrialized countries: many of the West European countries are not interested now in the growth of soil fertility, owing to the urge to maintain stable high productivity of agriculture and of having a series of socio-economic and political problems for the European Economic Community to tackle. This tendency might be just temporary, but it does exist at present.

On the contrary, increased attention to the problems of soil fertility growth, and to the protection of soils against progressing erosion and other hazardous processes, is a characteristic tendency of developing countries nowadays.