

## Toxics legislation must cut loopholes

Today's campus Toxic Tuesday event brings local attention to a national issue needing an increasing amount of attention: Toxic contamination of our land and water.

As part of one of this country's biggest student campaigns, the University's chapter of Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group has joined with 66 other campus PIRG chapters to support two pieces of legislation meant to tighten regulations surrounding toxic substance production, use and disposal.

PIRG is calling for passage of amendments to the Clean Water Act and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act as part of a larger agenda to reduce the use of toxins. Statute changes will be drafted this year, with final reauthorization occurring next year.

The question is, if these amendments pass, will they be enough?

Both laws have been in place for some time now, both have been amended and upgraded, and both remain largely ignored by perpetrators.

The 1948 Water Pollution Control Act was re-legislated in 1972 as the Clean Water Act, with more revisions following in 1977 and 1987. RCRA began as the Solid Waste Disposal Act in 1965, later revised to its present form in 1976, supposedly regulating hazardous waste from "cradle to grave."

Each new and improved version has passed unheeded by industry and unenforced by government. Both laws retain loopholes through which violators can escape, and strategies have never been concretely developed to reduce the production and usage of toxins.

Not that spelling the rules out would help. The Environmental Protection Agency's budget for creating and enforcing hazardous waste regulations saw a 25 percent decrease between 1981 and 1985, while state funding for inspection of toxic risk sites, such as landfills, ended in 1982. Most offenders are never caught, and if they are, there are rarely the funds or manpower to prosecute.

With funding for pollutant standard enforcement occupying the usual low rung on the Reagan-Bush ladder of priorities, further amendments to environmental laws are hollow.

There is hope, however. Included in PIRG's toxic-reduction plan is the promotion of The Community Right to Know Act of 1991. This bill would require industries to report the amount of chemical toxins they use, release and produce, and would also mandate industries to come up with plans for reducing their use of toxins.

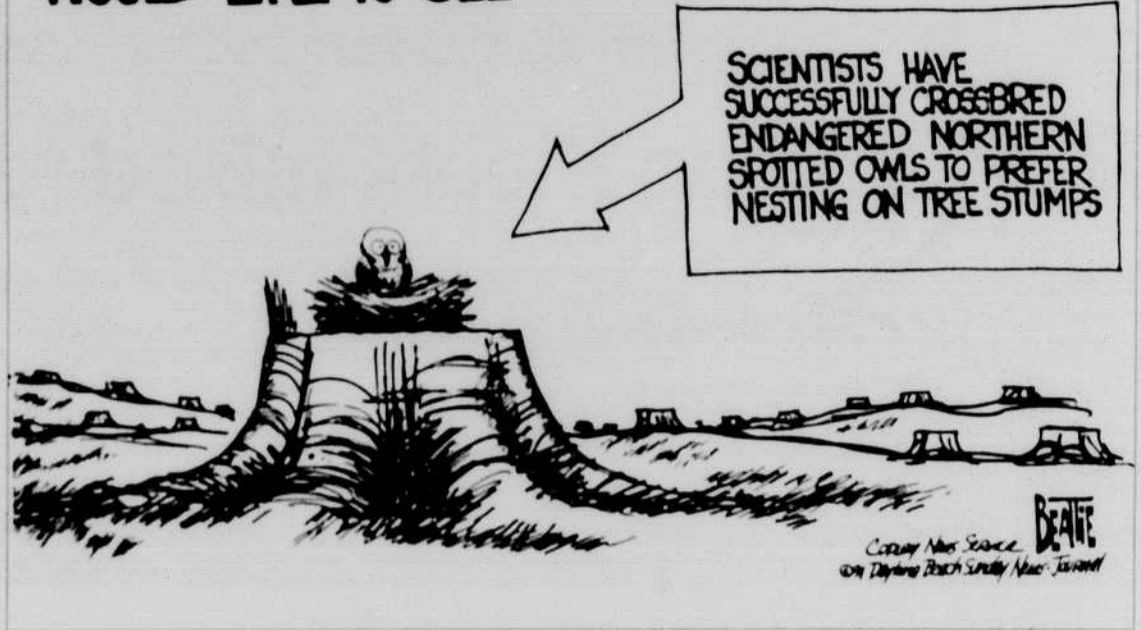
This could work because it would force polluters not only to develop a plan for lessening toxic chemical use, but to be held publicly accountable for adhering to their plan. Currently, only about 5 percent of chemical releases are reported.

Industry is now allowed to remain generally at large regarding its toxic dumping, proving to be one of the biggest problems of hazardous waste control, and resulting in problems to which the public hasn't a clue.

For example, Portland officials were warned by EPA and Department of Environmental Quality administrators not to use reserve water supplies during the city's recent drought, said Quincy Sugarman, Portland-based OSPIRG environmental advocate. The reason: Contaminated waters close to backup ground water supplies might be moved into the reserve aquifer if the saved waters were drawn for use.

These amendments need to pass, along with legislation designed to increase accountability and enforcement. It's time to start thinking about these problems in real terms. The issue of toxic waste isn't going to disappear; we need to begin acting now to prevent future irreversible damage.

## NEWS ITEM LOGGERS AND TIMBER COMPANIES WOULD LIKE TO SEE:



## LETTERS

### Bad karma

To Michael McGee, in response to his letter "Earn it," (ODE, Oct. 23):

Where did you get the impression that those who cannot afford health care are drunks "who lacks the integrity and discipline to pull him/herself out of the gutter ..." in need of a liver transplant? For your information, many of those in need of health care are working people, some working several minimum-wage jobs to support their families. If they or their children fall ill or are injured, I guess you think they should just die, thus eliminating the problem.

Maybe your parents pay your living expenses. Maybe you are still covered by their health plan. I was on my own parents' health plan until I reached 22 years of age.

Hopefully, I won't get sick or injured, or at least until I graduate and become a teacher. I am a full-time student and I work to pay my rent and bills. But if I do get sick, I suppose you would want me to die, too.

I can only hope for continued good health, and that your karma will catch up to you.

Susan Oswald  
Romance languages

### High time

I would just like to say that I'm tired of all this pansy whimpering about the evils of Christopher Columbus and the alleged genocide of the aboriginal Americans.

When are these descendants of such people going to admit that they were physiologically and politically incapable of dealing with the European diseases and social changes

brought about by the introduction of diversity to their shores? It's high time they admit to their societal evils instead of solely glorifying their past, and spreading condemnation for Europe's.

Why aren't the facts of human sacrifice, starvation, and constant warfare between tribes ever mentioned by adherents of the "paradise" propaganda?

Civilizations come and go, and I believe it's high time to end this 500-year-old cry-festival, and realize the past is gone and people need to start living.

Matt Kokkeler  
History/political science

### Legality

Some of the claims made by Michael McGee justifying our current health care system (ODE, Oct. 23) are incorrect.

He believes the U.S. Constitution guarantees "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Because of this assumption, Mr. McGee claims the Constitution entitles U.S. citizens the ability to "earn (their) own profits," and does not entitle them "to demand from others what (they) ... are unwilling to earn."

Since the "... pursuit of happiness" phrase is actually from the preamble to the Declaration of Independence, not the Constitution, it has no true legal or social significance and entitles its citizens to nothing.

This phrase will not protect your wallet from the wretched poor who desire health care, nor will it protect you if you become one of these unlucky millions.

Dan Kaufman  
Eugene

### Labels

Why is it that when individuals have something provocative or upsetting to disclose, they are automatically labeled as being hopelessly emotional and confrontational, and consequently dismissed? Moreover, why are these accusations more easily hurled at women in general?

I recognize my questions are by no stretch of the imagination unprecedented. However, when I recently realized that I have been branded "emotional" and "confrontational" because I happen to question vociferously the plight of exiled Palestinians like myself who were displaced from their homeland following the so-called 1948 Israeli War of Independence, I was aghast at the cowardice of (some of) my adversaries.

Could I, a Palestinian who happens to be residing in Eugene and not in Palestine precisely because of the 1948 displacement of her Palestinian father from his homeland by Zionist Jews, be in any way hallucinating? Or maybe I simply forgot that truth and fact are so conveniently made relative.

Or better yet, maybe I am not being realistic enough, in which case realism translates into an acceptance of the status quo — no matter how appalling that very status quo may be.

For sure, I have become confident of at least one thing: I take great pride in being subject to these labels, and I gladly welcome more.

Hanan Ramahi  
Student

