

EDITORIAL

The rumours we mentioned in the last issue concerning the US Environmental Protection Agency have partially materialized. William Ruckelshaus has taken over as Administrator and we welcome him back as a guarantor that the weakening of environmental policy in the US will now be halted. James Watt is still at Interior, where he is now the owner of a plaster foot (presented by President Reagan) to underline his capacity for shooting himself in the same.

A similar scandal to that which finally led to the changes at EPA, is still occupying European public opinion. Already in January, it was known that the Italian Government had given an undertaking to the firm contracted to dispose of the Seveso waste that no questions would be posed as to the later whereabouts of the 41 drums of dioxin. Now we are faced with the result — some depots have been searched, some “back gardens” dug up, but the waste hasn't turned up. No government knows where it is — in fact no-one other than the “disposer” knows, and he is in protective custody and refusing to talk. It is now rumoured that the waste could have been thrown into the North Sea.

All this illustrates more than ever that international regulations concerning the transport, handling and disposal of hazardous wastes are urgently needed. The EC directive (see page 93 and 103) will be a step in the right direction, but not what is finally required. It demonstrates that experts in the preparation of the Montevideo Senior Level Meeting on Environmental Law and Conference delegates (see Environmental Policy and Law 8 (1) 1982 at pages 31-32) were on the right track. The UNEP meeting to prepare guidelines, principles or a convention (at the global level) for the transport, handling and disposal of toxic and dangerous wastes, will be hosted by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany from 28th February to 5th March 1984, in Munich. Much interest has already been shown in the report being prepared for the conference by Prof. Malcolm Forster (Southampton). IUCN and the ELIS Data Bank (see page 89) helped to supply the international material for this report.

The reaction to forest damage and now this new Seveso case, has shown that the policy of the new German Minister of the Interior, contrary to prior expectations, is not affecting his country's progressive environmental policy. The new regulations concerning emission limits with provisions especially for major industrial installations, show that he is willing to take on the problems in the face of strong opposition from some branches of industry.

We are sorry to see that State Secretary Günther Hartkopf has left the Ministry at his own request, since he was not only known as a “champion” of the environment but also contributed to many international organizations and also as an author to this journal.

* * *

The Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme will meet in Nairobi from 11 to 24 May. Papers being presented to the GC will already be reviewed in the next issue and we hope that this will enable us to report faster in the following one on the results of the session.

* * *

A Basic paper on the Islamic Principles for the Conservation of the Natural Environment will be presented at the Governing Council in Arabic, English and French (we shall report) and a “legal history” of the World Charter for Nature is being prepared and will be discussed in the coming issue.

* * *

Good News: On the 24th March the Sixth Meeting of the ASEAN Experts Group on the Environment adopted the draft ASEAN Agreement on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources with minor amendments. They recommended that the adopted draft Agreement be submitted to COST — the parent body of the Expert Group — for final endorsement at its Ninth Meeting in September 1983 in Thailand. The Agreement will subsequently be submitted to the appropriate ASEAN bodies so that the signing of the Agreement can be implemented as soon as possible. □

28 April 1983