Hidden Savings from a Cleaner America

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AMERICANS CAN HAVE a cleaner America by 1980 – and save $12 billion a year at the same time.

This is no pipe dream. It is the sober estimate of responsible environmental experts.

This dramatic figure was brought to light after intensive digging by a National Wildlife Federation investigative team which interviewed scores of environmental experts and economists during recent months.

The pollution arithmetic is simple:

1. Nationwide bill for damages from air and water pollution is estimated at $28.9 billion annually. Your family's share of that is $481.

2. A reasonable cleanup program will require an investment of $10.2 billion annually. Your family's share: $170.

3. But this cleanup will reduce pollution damages by a whopping $22.2 billion! Your family's share: $370.

4. You pay out $170 for cleanup and reduce your pollution damage bill by $370, for a net savings of $200 in your annual expenditures. More importantly, cleaner air and cleaner water give a new lease on life to all creatures, be they eagles, oysters, or men. Here's how we arrived at these startling figures:

AIR POLLUTION: The President's own Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) reports that the current air cleanup campaign will cost $23.7 billion between 1970 and 1975. Economists estimate this will reduce air pollution damages by two-thirds by 1976.

Polluted air causes the following damages, says the CEQ: human health, $6 billion; materials and vegetation, $4.9 billion; lowering of property values, $5.2 billion.

Some economists believe these figures are too conservative because they do not include shortened life due to illness or loss of scenic values. One expert told us: "If we continue to establish comprehensive air pollution standards – and if we have the courage to enforce them – by 1976 we can reduce air pollution by 80 to 90 percent!"

WATER POLLUTION: The story here is equally dramatic, though specific figures are unavailable and Federal officials are almost embarrassed by the lack of data.

Nevertheless, the Federation talked with economists who have researched this problem for years. They estimate that water pollution costs the United States $12.8 billion annually. They also believe pollution damages can be reduced 90 percent by 1980.

Polluted water costs you and the nation untold billions in reduced output, increased expenses, higher taxes, and, most importantly, a generally poorer life:

The polluted Delaware estuary alone represents $350 million in lost recreational opportunities. One-fifth of the nation's shellfish beds are closed because of water pollution. A single child born retarded because of chemical contamination of the water his mother drinks can cost society $250,000 in remedial training and custodial care.

These figures and conclusions raise inevitable questions:

Are these estimates anywhere near accurate?

Economists and environmental experts freely admit that research data is skimpy. Some contend the government has been derelict in not running return-on-investment studies similar to those which all industries do before committing their dollars to any new project. However, our sources defend the figures in this article as conservative – both in damages and in ultimate savings. (I invite anyone who believes he has more reliable figures to speak up – environmental cleanup must be a team effort.)

- *Government has no money except yours. Business passes on costs in higher prices. So you, the taxpayer-consumer, pay all of the $28.9 billion pollution bill.*

- *"What an investment opportunity! Where else can you improve your quality of life and save money at the same time?"*

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When does the taxpayer-consumer start getting back the money he's invested?

Air savings should be fully effective by 1976; water savings, by 1980. Based on our experts' figures, the Federation estimates the average family must invest a total of approximately $500 by 1975, without return. But by 1979 the family will recover this $500; and by 1980 each family will have an annual savings of $200.

But will people make this investment?

Yes. For more than 200 years Americans have been profit motivated. Show them where they can make or save a buck, and you'll get action. But I hope that dollar economics will never be our sole guide. Quality of life is a concern that transcends dollars and cents. Happily, pollution cleanup meets both criteria – it helps improve our quality of life, and it saves us money.

But what about those estimates of $105 billion to clean up pollution?

That's the figure given in the report of the President's Council on Environmental Quality. But, by the Council's own admission, this figure is inflated since is contains a $43.5 billion estimate designated for solid waste disposal. And, to quote the CEQ, "This figure greatly overstates the costs required for meeting a higher standard of environmental quality, since the overwhelming bulk of those costs is for garbage pickup, a service traditionally provided in urban areas (and currently being paid for)."

Is pollution cleanup on schedule?

The Clean Air Act of 1970 has sufficient strength to accomplish goals set forth in this article. Our air pollution figures are valid – assuming these IFS: IF current strict standards are not lessened . . . IF timetables set forth are met . . . IF regulations are enforced.

Water pollution figures are based on the Water Quality Act of 1965. However, in my opinion, this effort to clean up has been a failure to date because standards are not uniform or complete and state enforcement has lagged. For example: Only 27 states have "No further degradation" clauses. Current hope is the new Water Pollution Bill which will probably pass Congress early this year. It sets up strict Federal standards for effluent discharge by the industrial polluter and provides for tough enforcement.

What can an individual do?

Be informed. Do not be misled by sweeping statements, for example, that "pollution cleanup will cost too much," or by simplistic slogans like "What do you want – fish or jobs?" Attend public hearings which are provided for by law. Remember that both air and water pollution laws also provide that you as a citizen can bring a lawsuit directly against a polluter, or the Environmental Protection Agency itself when it can be shown the government has not acted to enforce its own regulations. □

- *Figures on pollution damages and savings from resulting cleanup are scarce. A crash program is badly needed to get at the facts.*

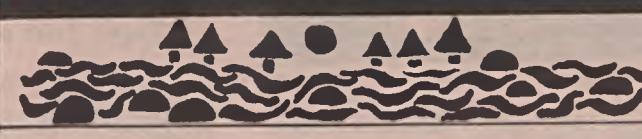
- *Is environmental cleanup a passing fad? Will citizens pay to clean up?*

How you will save money from cleanup of air pollution

		Total for United States	Your Share As Head of Family
POLLUTION DAMAGES IN 1972	Air pollution now does this much damage each year . . .	$16.1 billion	$268
GROSS SAVINGS FROM CLEANUP	A cleanup program can reduce this damage 66% by 1976. Then annual gross savings will be . . .	$10.7 billion	$178
minus **COST OF CLEANUP**	Deduct from future gross savings the annual cost of cleanup . . .	$3.9 billion	$65
equals **NET ANNUAL SAVINGS**	So in 1976 the air cleanup will result in net annual savings of . . .	$6.8 billion	$113

YOUR FAMILY can save $113 a year with a cleanup campaign that will reduce pollution damages 66 percent. These figures were developed by an investigative team of the National Wildlife Federation.

How you will save money from cleanup of water pollution



		Total for United States	Your Share As Head of Family
POLLUTION DAMAGES IN 1972	Water pollution now does this much damage each year . . .	$12.8 billion	$213
GROSS SAVINGS FROM CLEANUP	A cleanup program can reduce this damage 90% by 1980. Then annual gross savings will be . . .	$11.5 billion	$192
minus **COST OF CLEANUP**	Deduct from future gross savings the annual cost of cleanup . . .	$6.3 billion	$105
equals **NET ANNUAL SAVINGS**	So in 1980 water cleanup will result in net annual savings of . . .	$5.2 billion	$87

YOUR FAMILY can save $87 a year with a cleanup campaign that will reduce water pollution damages by 90 percent. These figures were developed by an investigative team of the National Wildlife Federation.