

"we are more concerned about the farmers, occupationally exposed workers, pesticide applicators, weekend gardeners, and

others who may be repeatedly exposed to much higher levels of pesticides and therefore are at greater risk."

## False Fixes

"Sense and Nonsense on the Environment" by Warren T. Brookes, in *The Quill* (Jan.-Feb. 1991), Society of Professional Journalists, P.O. Box 77, Greencastle, Ind. 46135-0077.

When McDonald's Corp. agreed last fall to abort its program to recycle the polystyrene cartons it uses for its hamburgers, and to go back instead to using coated paperboard, some environmentalists and journalists hailed the decision as "good news for the planet." In reality, says Brookes, a Washington-based editorial writer for the *Detroit News*, the hamburger chain's decision was "on balance, *bad* news, because it will at least double the net adverse impact on the nation's environment."

That's because coated paperboard, unlike polystyrene, is not recyclable, and because producing it takes 40-50 percent more energy and results in two to three times the air pollution and at least 70 percent more waterborne wastes.

Why, then, did McDonald's decide to switch? Brookes suspects that the firm was concerned less about the environment than about its corporate image. McDonald's was under pressure from the Environmental Defense Fund, and the foam packaging had simply become "a public relations liability."

But the "Big Mac" threat is hardly the only environmental peril that's been greatly exaggerated in recent years, Brookes maintains. For example, he points to the "ecological disaster" of the March 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in Alaska's

Prince William Sound.

"Contrary to the hysteria generated by the news media and environmentalists," Brookes writes, a report published last year by James Mielke of the Congressional Research Service found that the ecological effects of such spills are relatively modest and short-lived. The chemicals in petroleum, Mielke noted, "have long been part of the marine environment and physical impacts are likely to be temporary in the dynamic natural flux of the coastal environment." As an example of how little lasting ecological damage was done in Alaska, Mielke said that 40 million pink salmon—an all-time record number—were caught in Prince William Sound last year, and most of the fingerlings had been released into Sound hatcheries *after* the *Exxon Valdez* spill. In Mielke's view, the \$2 billion spent on the cleanup there was "money that could have been better spent."

Who's responsible for all the exaggerated environmental fears? Brookes says that the news media deserve much of the blame. Journalists are properly skeptical of environmental claims made by industry, he says, but they also need to be skeptical of claims made by the Environmental Protection Agency and by "self-styled public-interest groups, many of which misuse or abuse scientific data to arouse fear."

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## ARTS & LETTERS

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### Flag Revolution

"Waving the Red Flag and Reconstituting Old Glory" by Albert Boime, in *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* (Spring 1990), Oxford Univ. Press, 2001 Evans Rd., Cary, N.C. 27513.

When young radicals burned the U.S. flag during the antiwar protests of the 1960s, the venerable Socialist leader Norman

Thomas (1884-1968) was appalled. He thought the protesters "should be washing the flag, not burning it." Little more than