How to Poison Earth

Linnea Saukko

Student writer Linnea Saukko satirically addresses the willful polluting of Earth by corporations and governments. In the tradition of all good satires, Saukko exposes the inherent folly in polluting our planet without concern for the environment and for future generations of life on Earth.

It can be difficult to poison Earth because Earth is always trying to cleanse and renew itself. Keeping this in mind, we should generate as much waste as possible from substances such as uranium-238, which has a *half-life* (the time it takes for half of the substance to decay) of 1 million years, or plutonium, which has a half-life of only 0.5 million years but is so toxic that if distributed evenly over the land, 10 pounds of it could kill every person on Earth. Because the United States generates about 18 tons of plutonium per year, it is about the best substance for long-term poisoning of Earth. It would help if we would build more nuclear power plants because each one generates only 500 pounds of plutonium each year. Of course, we must include persistent toxic chemicals such as polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) and dichlorodiphenyl trichloroethane (DDT) to make sure we have enough toxins to poison Earth from the core to the outer atmosphere. First, we must develop many different ways of putting the waste from these nuclear and chemical substances in, on, and around Earth. 1

Putting these substances in Earth is a most important step in the poisoning process. With deep-well injection, we can ensure that Earth is poisoned all the way to the core. Deep-well injection involves drilling a hole . . . a few thousand feet deep and injecting toxic substances at extremely high pressures so they will penetrate deep into Earth. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), there are about 360 such deep-injection wells in the United States. We cannot forget the groundwater aquifers that are closer to the surface. These must also be contaminated. This is easily done by shallow-well injection, which operates on the same principle as deep-well injection, only closer to the surface. The groundwater that has been injected with toxins will spread the contamination beneath Earth. The EPA estimates that there are approximately 500,000 shallow-injection wells in the United States.

The next best method is to bury toxins in Earth. The toxins from landfills, dumps, and lagoons slowly seep into Earth, guaranteeing that contamination will last a long time. Because the EPA estimates [that] there are only about 50,000 of these dumps in the United States, they should be located in areas where they will leak to the surrounding ground and surface water.

Applying pesticides and other poisons on Earth is another part of the poisoning process. This is good for coating Earth's surface so that the poisons will be absorbed by plants, will seep into the ground, and will run off into surface water.

Surface water is very important to contaminate because it will transport the poisons to places that cannot be contaminated directly. Lakes are good for long-term storage of pollutants while they release some of their contamination to rivers. The only trouble with rivers is that they act as a natural cleansing system for Earth. No matter how much poison is dumped into them, they will try to transport it away to reach the ocean eventually.

The ocean is very hard to contaminate because it has such a large volume and a natural buffering capacity that tends to neutralize some of the contamination. So in addition to the pollution from rivers, we must use the ocean as a dumping place for as many toxins as possible. The ocean currents will help transport the pollution to places that cannot otherwise be reached.

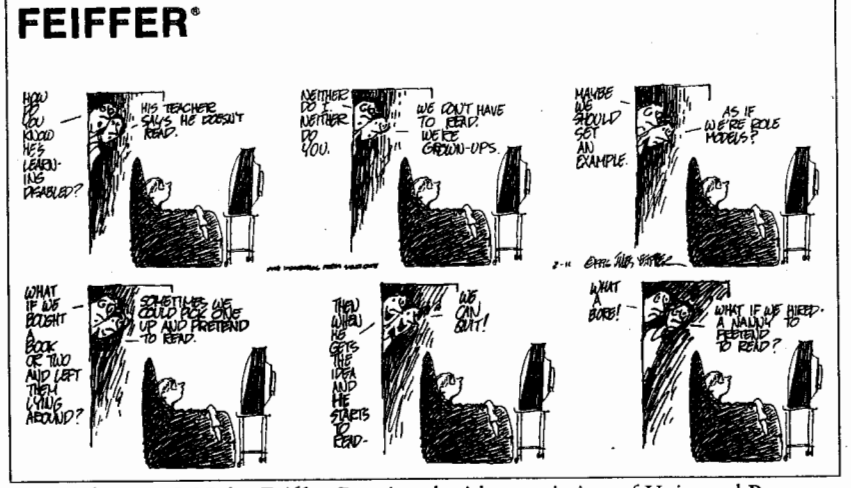
Now make sure that the air around Earth is very polluted. Combustion and evaporation are major mechanisms for doing this. We must continuously pollute because the wind will disperse the toxins while rain washes them from the air, but this is good because a few lakes are stripped of all living animals each year from acid rain. Because the lower atmosphere can cleanse itself fairly easily, we must explode nuclear test bombs that shoot radioactive particles high into the upper atmosphere where they will circle Earth for years. Gravity must pull some of the particles to Earth, so we must continue exploding these bombs.

So it is that easy. Just be sure to generate as many poisonous substances as possible, and be sure they are distributed in, on, and around Earth at a greater rate than it can cleanse itself. By following these easy steps, we can guarantee the poisoning of Earth.

CHAPTER 10: ACTIVITIES FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING

Making Connections

1. Write a letter to President Clinton or to your congressperson, alerting these officials to a particular concern of yours about an environmental issue. Be specific in describing the issue. Include some potential solutions suggested either by the readings in this chapter



2. Investigate and write a paper on an environmental issue that concerns you. You may want to research books, scholarly journals, magazines, or newspapers in the library. Consult the computer databases in your library, if available, to assist you in locating the latest information. Use the Internet to gain access to relevant material through the World Wide Web.

3. Considering Sagan's "The Nuclear Winter," Stein's "Bomb Ban on the Brink," and Bradbury's "There Will Come Soft Rains," choose one of the following topics for developing an essay:
   a. Important steps that are occurring, which might halt the potential for a nuclear winter
   b. How Bradbury's futuristic cyberhouse might hold up through a nuclear winter: How would you design a more nuclearproof cyberhouse?
   c. A letter to the nations known as nuclear powers, detailing Sagan's scientific hypothesis about thermonuclear destruction and outlining steps they should take to prevent destruction

4. Write a satire, as student writer Linnea Saukko has, on an environmental issue. Reread "How to Poison Earth" as a representative model.

5. Discuss the connection between the readings in this chapter (e.g., "The Environmental Crisis Is Not Our Fault," "Sustainability," and "Thinking Small in a Season of Excess") and Lawrence Shames's "The More Factor" in Chapter 5 of this text. Consider how America's desire for more has affected our environment. You may want to review other essays in this text, as well.