



Contributed to Maine Memory Network by Edmund S. Muskie  
Archives and Special Collections Library  
Date: April 22, 1970  
Description: Letter to Edmund Muskie about Portland pollution

US PHS Outpatient Clinic  
331 Veranda Street  
Portland, Maine 04103  
April 22, 1970

Senator Edmund Muskie  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510  
Dear Senator Muskie:

I am a dentist in the U.S. Public Health Service in Portland, Maine. Ever since my tour of duty began here almost two years ago, I have been appalled by the wanton disregard by the city of Portland and surrounding communities in the field of pollution. I find it incredible that a city of 75,000 people dumps all its sewage into the ocean raw!!!

In particular, I would like to know how S. D. Warren Paper Co. in Westbrook can keep getting away with the massive amount of air and water polluting that it does. I come from the Fox River Valley area in Wisconsin, the largest paper producing area in the world, and while not professing to be an expert on paper mill pollution, I have never noticed the Fox River or the Wisconsin air smelling so offensively as does the Presumpscot River and the Maine air. The point I'm trying to make is that contrary to all the claims that S. D. Warren makes about removing most of its pollutants (98%, one of their engineers told me), they are not doing the job the paper companies are capable of, because how can one paper company foul the water and air to an apparent greater extent than many do in the Fox River Valley area of Wisconsin. It's about time that S. D. Warren started utilizing available technology to eliminate its pollution, at its own expense when necessary, rather than just throw the people of this area an occasional political pacification bone such as when they talk about their pollution sampling stations located throughout the area that, sure enough, reveal pollution in the air from their plant. Every citizen can detect that with just a good nose; people want positive action from S. D. Warren!

Enclosed are four colored prints from some slides that I took on March 27, 1970 at 1:00 P.M. The location is from behind the U.S. Public Health Service Outpatient Clinic. The Presumpscot River is flowing into Casco Bay with Mackworth or Gov. Baxter Island to the left, just out of the picture. I will admit that the city of Portland had some heavy rains on the evening of March 26, 1970 and that some of this debris is sand washed down from the River's banks (poor soil conservation, I might add). However, a very large portion of this debris is pollution from the city of Westbrook and S. D. Warren Co.. The smell of this river is nauseating and its contents consists of feces, paper fibers, etc. The photos I think illustrate how the current of the Presumpscot River carries this filth out into Casco Bay as photo #4 was taken at 3:00 P.M., two hours after photo #1.

Turning my attention onto the city of Portland itself, I personally asked the mayor of Portland, John Sturgis, whom I know you know, what he intended

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to do about the pollution here in Portland. He said, among other things, "You know, pollution is a political issue. In a few years it will be off page one and the politicians will find something else to talk about." When I sharply disagreed with his faulty reasoning and said that pollution as an issue is here to stay and either we would have to solve the problem or we might not live to see 2000 A.D., he replied, "Well, I'm not going to be around that long anyway." (I can honestly say that these quotes are 100% accurate in content and meaning and several people who work in our clinic heard the Mayor make these statements.)

Although the Mayor of Portland, as I understand it, is largely a figurehead with the city council being the real power, how can the people of Portland and Maine itself ever expect to clean up their pollution when people in public office, like Mayor Sturgis, have such a shallow understanding of the severity of the problem andan almost utter disregard of its solution?

I base my last statement - an almost utter disregard of its solution - on several other statements he made during our discussion. He kept saying that it was cheaper for the people of Portland to dump their sewage in the ocean than it was to treat it, and that it would cost \$25,000,000 for a complete sewage disposal plant and that wouldn't be any good if the surrounding communities of Falmouth, Cumberland, etc. didn't stop polluting too. Personally, I feel that the city of Portland is using the above arguments to justify their lack of action. Being the largest metropolis in Maine, Portland should take the first steps as they pollute the most. In turn, if they cannot afford to depollute the entire city, why not start by depolluting the downtown area and then be able to add on to a properly designed sewage system other parts of the city when finances allow. Eliminating even a small amount of the pollution in the area would surely be better than none at all and further more, it would be a start - a start that has been lacking for decades too long already.

Senator Muskie, I truly admire you for the efforts you have made toward pollution elimination throughout your career. However, your own state of Maine is sadly lacking in pollution abatement, especially when you consider Maine's small population and relatively little industry. Please don't misunderstand my intentions in this letter, for I am not bragging up my own state of Wisconsin at Maine's expense, as every state in this country better wake up and in a hurry. However, I hopefully look toward you, Senator Muskie, to get something done about the pollution by the S. D. Warren Paper Co. and the city of Portland (perhaps at your upcoming Senate subcommittee meeting on air and water pollution). It seems to me that no one else in a position of power cares. I know that you do . . . Please act!!!

Respectfully yours,  
*Richard E. Gosse, D.D.S.*  
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