

OUR ENVIRONMENT

Decomposition Rates for Litter

The *New Hampshire Campground Owners Newsletter* reports the following rates of decomposition for various types of roadside litter. (The identity and qualifications of the estimator were not given.)

- Orange peel: 2 weeks to 5 months
- Plastic-coated paper: 1-5 years
- Plastic bags: 10-20 years
- Plastic film: 20-30 years
- Nylon fabrics: 30-40 years
- Hiking boot soles: 50-80 years
- Aluminum tabs, cans: 80-100 years

Lucrative Skullhunting Reduces Mountain Gorilla Population

Twenty years ago there were 500 mountain gorillas on the Zaire-Rwanda border. Today, primarily because of habitat destruction, numbers are down to about 250. Trade in gorilla skulls has become a lucrative business as they are sought as souvenirs by European tourists, consequently poaching has become a serious problem.

At least 16 gorillas have been killed for their heads since 1976. In 1978 the dominant male of a troop was killed; this may result in the whole troop of animals dying out as younger animals probably have not attained the maturity necessary to hold the group together.

Geese as Guards

Geese, the sentinels that reportedly warned the Romans of encroaching Gauls, are still used as watchdogs. In Dunbarton, Scotland, six dozen white geese guard about 30 million gallons of whiskey, valued at over \$900 million dollars. Any intruder is greeted with a fanfare of hissing and honking. The unique security force has been found to be more effective than dogs, people, or mechanical devices.

Norwegian Scheme for Car Recycling

After one year of operation, Norway's "deposit legislation" on privately owned cars seems to be a success. The program requires a \$100 deposit on new cars at time of purchase. The money is returned when the auto is scrapped. Based on the "polluters pay" principle, the system has resulted in the recycling of 41,000 autos and

vans. A 20 to 25 percent reduction in steel imports by Norway has been one of several benefits.

Kirtland's Warbler Increases in Michigan

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources announced that its 1980 census of the Kirtland's warbler population in Michigan was up 30 pairs from last year's census. The inventory revealed 242 pairs of Kirtland's warblers in the six-county survey.

The Kirtland's warbler, a federally endangered species, is dependent on Michigan's jackpine habitat for nesting. The tiny bird winters in the Bahamas and returns to Michigan each year to nest.

Thomas Sheldrake, an endangered species biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in Minneapolis, said that although the 1980 census was good news, the warbler population is still precariously scant in total numbers. "Our cooperative goal for the Kirtland's warbler is 1,000 pairs," he said. "This target population level can only be achieved by increases in the nesting habitat."

Sheldrake said biologists conclude that it will take roughly 36,000 acres of prime nesting habitat to achieve a population of 1,000 pairs. Currently the warbler population in Michigan has around 17,000 acres of nesting habitat. The FWS said the recent Mack Lake fire did not affect the warbler population. The birds simply left the area for other sites when a large scale fire swept through the Mack Lake area.

Hydrocarbons as Air Pollutants

Gasoline prices at the pump are at an all-time high, yet millions of gallons of gasoline literally go up in the air in the Midwest every year.

The loss occurs at gasoline storage and loading terminals, during the loading process. Here's how it happens.

A tank truck pulls into a gasoline distribution terminal and parks next to a gasoline loading rack, which is a platform full of pipes and pumps that transfer gasoline from the storage tank to the truck. A loading arm from the platform is coupled to the truck, and gasoline is then pumped into the truck.

The truck's tank appears to be empty, but actually it's full of hydrocarbon (gasoline) vapors left over from previous loads. The liquid gasoline pumped into the

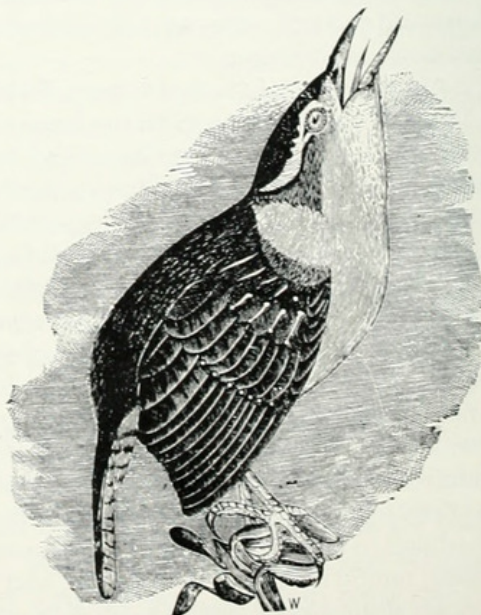
truck displaces those vapors, which escape through the hatch into the air.

Once in the air, hydrocarbons react with nitrogen oxides and sunlight to form ozone, commonly known as smog. Ozone is one of the five major air pollutants for which EPA has established a national health-related standard. If ozone exceeds that standard, it means your health can be adversely affected. Studies show that ozone can impair normal lung functions and cause symptoms such as eye irritation, coughing, choking, headache, and severe fatigue. Besides helping to form ozone, escaping hydrocarbons represent gasoline that is lost forever.

There are three basic loading methods used at gasoline terminals: splash loading (from the top of the truck), submerged top-fill loading (with load pipe extended to 18 inches of truck bottom), and submerged bottom-fill loading. Submerged loading (top- and bottom-fill) reduces gasoline vapor loss by 58 percent when compared to splash loading, but neither method is approved by EPA as the answer to hydrocarbon pollution control. The installation of vapor recovery and control equipment is the only sure method, EPA emphasizes.

If vapor recovery systems were installed and operating properly at all gasoline loading facilities cited for violations to date, EPA estimates that oil companies in Illinois could recapture 4.2 million gallons of gasoline per year.

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