

TO: The Cambridge Chronicle

FROM: Vivian Kurkjian, 86 Buckingham St., Cambridge, 02138
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DATE: June 22, 1987

A LITTLE FRESH AIR, PLEASE!

Ever since the City created some nice outdoor areas for the public in Harvard Square, the streets, along with every patch of grass, tree trunk and bush, have become layered with cigarette butts and the air has become terrible to breathe. Chainsmokers spend their entire day in the Square and seem to create their body weight in cigarette butts. The worst spot is Holyoke Center where there is an outdoor cafe; the second, Brattle Square. By copy of this letter, I am asking the City Council to call the DEQE in Woburn (935-2160) to measure the quality of air in Harvard Square and any other part of Cambridge which might have the same problem. It is astonishing that we cannot burn leaves or shake out a dust mop yet we are constantly inundated with second-hand tobacco smoke.

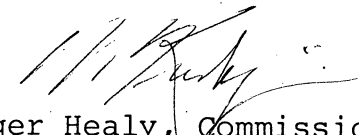
The time has come to start ticketing those who refuse to comply with the no smoking laws in restaurants and stores and those who carelessly toss lit cigarettes in the air and street without any consideration of bystanders. Surely there must be litter and public nuisance laws to cover this type of offensive behavior.

The public would be better served with the enforcement of this health and safety hazard than with meter maids and men ticketing cars temporarily overparked. The ticketed party is probably spending money to enhance Cambridge's economy whereas the street smoker, which has become rampant, is contributing to the destruction of the environment and endangering the health of his fellow man.

Until there are separate places, built with cigarette taxes, or tobacco companies offer places to smoke in a public setting, the majority of people would appreciate a breath of fresh air in our rapidly polluted world with designated smoke-free oases.

I would recommend the new JFK park, Brattle Square and Holyoke Center (which could be policed by Harvard University if it is their property). This would provide an opportunity for self-discipline for those who would not get anywhere. Prohibiting smoking at MBTA stops, the Red Line T entrance and amphitheatre in Harvard Square would also ease the problem of street gangs since they will not congregate long where they cannot smoke and perhaps a few will find something more constructive or recreational to do with their lives.

CC: Cambridge City Council, City Manager Healy, Commissioner of Health Chalfen



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SECOND-HAND SMOKE

HYDROQUINONE METHACROLEIN METHYL ALCOHOL METHYLAMINE NICKLE COMPOUNDS PYRIDINE
CARBON DIOXIDE CROTONONITRILE DIMETHYLAMINE ENDRIN ETHYLAMINE FURFURAL CADMIUM
CARBON MONOXIDE METHYL NITRITE AMMONIA FORMALDEHYDE HYDROGEN SULFIDE
BENZO (A) PYRENE NICOTINE DDT ETHANE ACETYLENE METHANOL NITROGEN DIOXIDE
ACETONE METHYL CHLORIDE PHENOL CRESOL METHANE ISOPRENE PROPANE ACROLEIN
ACETALDEHYDE ETHYLENE METHYL ETHYL KETONE "TAR" HYDROGEN CYANIDE METALS
HYDROCYANIC ACID NITRIC OXIDE ACETONITRILE ACRYLONITRILE
BENZENE 2,3, -- BUTYLAMINE

EXCEEDS:

- OCCUPATIONAL THRESHOLD LIMIT VALUE FOR A NORMAL WORK PERIOD
- MAXIMUM LEGAL LIMITS FOR AIR POLLUTION FOR AMBIENT AIR QUALITY.



Birds die, Mexico City wonders: Who's next?

By Bernd Debusmann
Reuter News Service

MEXICO CITY — When birds began falling out of the sky to die in convulsions in smog-choked Mexico City, a government ecology official had a ready explanation: the birds were overtired, he suggested, or perhaps they had a poor diet.

Hundreds of American robins and cedar waxwings dying of fatigue? On days this winter when heavy air pollution drove tears to the eyes of Mexico City residents, constricted their throats, stuffed up their noses, and made their chests ache?

The Ministry for Urban Development and Ecology, whose undersecretary Sergio Reyes Lujan suggested bird fatigue, furnished other possible causes for the mass death of migratory birds in one of the most polluted capitals on earth.

The birds might have eaten poisonous fruit from the trees they use as resting places on their long journey from Canada and the United States to southern Mexico and Central America.

Toxic levels

Or maybe they were brought down by toxic insecticides ingested en route. They were already sick by the time they reached the largest city in the world.

Concerned citizens collected some 500 bird bodies, dumped some of them in front of the ministry and took others to laboratories for autopsies. The diagnoses failed to confirm bird fatigue or poor diets.

Instead, they showed very high levels of lead and cadmium in the birds' blood. Both are highly toxic, counting among dozens of polluting agents found in the air here.

After conducting its own post-mortems, the ministry finally conceded that Mexico City air pollution was at least a contributing factor in the deaths of the waxwings and robins.

The demise of the birds and the ministry's reaction in the first weeks of February underlined the government's problems in dealing with pollution in a city where 2.5 to three million cars and 130,000 factories spew toxic fumes into the air day after day.

"There is a tendency to minimize our most serious problem," said Homero Aridjis, president of a group of writers, artists and intellectuals who said in their founding statement two years ago Mexico City's people were doomed to a slow death if nothing was done to curb pollution.

"In Mexico, politicians seem to think problems go away simply by making a speech or announcing a program about them," Aridjis said in an interview. "But programs remain on paper. There is a lot of talk and little action."

Leading writers

His committee of 100 includes some leading Latin American writers and painters, including Nobel-prize winning novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez, a Colombian who lives in Mexico City, Mexican writer Octavio Paz, and painter Rufino Tamayo.

"The government's initial reaction was typical: say there is no problem and hope for its miraculous disappearance," he said. "We see it differently: the birds are live thermometers, live gauges of the danger that is facing all of us."

Columnist Jose Angel Colchello of the respected newspaper El Universal echoed such sentiments, "Today it's the birds, tomorrow it's us."

Some ecologists say that tomorrow has already come. According to Alfonso Cipres Villareal, head of the Mexican Ecologist Movement, almost 30,000 children died in the capital last year of diseases brought on by pollution.

S-431

Comm. from Vivian Kurkjian Re: increasing prevalence of smokers congregating in outdoor areas of Harvard Sq. & requesting that the congregation of said smokers be restricted.

In City Council,

June 29, 1987

Placed on File

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