

A Letter from the Publisher

For the TIME correspondents who visited dozens of toxic dumps and waste sites across the country to get material for this week's cover, the story entailed some eerie hazards. "If you are reporting a riot and get hit with a bottle," says New York Bureau Chief Peter Stoler, a veteran of the science and environment beat, "you either come home well or you don't. But with hazardous waste, you become acutely aware of every sneeze, every rash. You wonder about being well 20 years from now." Chatting with fire fighters near a blazing Elizabeth, N.J., dump site at 3 a.m., Stoler glanced down to see his nylon sneakers "being eaten by chemicals in the soil. They were literally dissolving off my feet."

Most often, though, TIME reporters and photographers were better, though bulkily, equipped. They sweated inside disposable vinyl body suits and booties and hard hats. Wearing a respirator was a new experience for Chicago-based Correspondent Madeleine Nash, who went to dump sites in six states. Says she: "Breathing through those things is hard labor. And even with one, sharp fumes cut through to create a slight burning in



Nash doffs respirator despite toxic chemicals

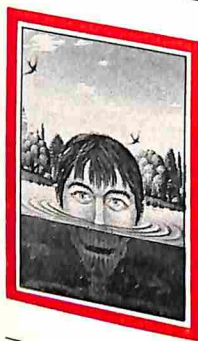
your throat." Mandatory rubber gloves made reporters look more like toddlers' scrawls.

Awkwardly confined in the hot body suits and encumbered with heavy cameras, photographers found their job difficult, especially when they were trying to compose a picture while wearing goggles. Says Photographer Bill Pierce, who viewed toxic dumps in New Jersey as well as farms and woodlands to hide chemical waste sites: "Hazardous waste does not always look like you'd expect. Quite often these dumps are rows of beautifully colored drums shining against a gorgeous, glowing sunset. We found some of the most photogenic sites were harmless. We had to take precise shots of the right time."

Neither Senior Writer Ed Magnuson, author of this cover story, nor Reporter-Researcher Nancy Williamson, who checked it, is a stranger to environmental nightmares. Williamson's Long Island community was threatened with ground-water pollution from chemicals at Three Mile Island 18 months ago.

John A. Meyers

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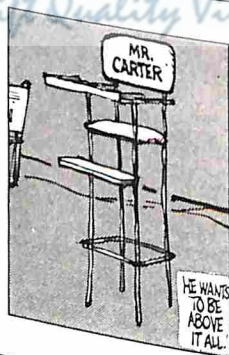


58 Cover: Dumped carelessly for decades, toxic chemical wastes now pose an ominous threat to the environment, particularly underground water supplies. A Surgeon General's report warns of the danger. See ENVIRONMENT.

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THE PERSIAN GULF
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TIME

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