

On My Mind
12/15/00

Whatever other problems the village of Tanapag may face vis-a-vis its PCB contamination, it can take pride in the small role it played in bringing to a successful conclusion a long struggle by the UN Environment Program's Fifth Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee meeting to put together a treaty banning persistent organic pollutants (POPs).

Press releases from Johannesburg, South Africa, where the committee has been meeting this past week, report that 122 countries have finally signed the treaty and agreed to ban "the dirty dozen" - twelve of the most toxic pollutants still in use around the world. Among those twelve: PCBs.

The United States - in conjunction with Canada and New Zealand - had sought to weaken the terms of the treaty to protect its own interests, but, as an e-mail message from the Greenpeace International Toxics Campaign Coordinator put it, "The EU [European Union] and many other countries did not bow to pressure from the JUSCANZ." Unfortunately, the message continues, "the text is unnecessarily weakened in several places."

The Greenpeace organization, for whom passage of the POPs treaty has been a major goal, cited Tanapag as an example of the U.S.' carelessness with toxic substances and its reluctance to clean up after the damage was done. Greenpeace members were on island earlier this year, collecting testimony and pictures for use in their campaign.

POPs are among a group of pollutants that break down slowly, travel easily in the environment, and have been linked to cancer, birth defects and other genetic abnormalities.

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The Christmas season brings many stresses as well as joys. Among the stresses, in the past, has been dealing with the U.S. Post Office, in sending as well as receiving packages. Slow service and long lines were the normal state of affairs, year after year.

All that has changed with the opening of the new U.S. Post Office in Chalan Kanoa. It's about as automated as you can get - with not only all sorts of self-service features (weighing letters, purchasing stamps, selecting package labels) - but also with customer-service features at the counter, such as the package scale tied to visible print-outs of postage charges.

In addition, the U.S. Post Office now offers an array of packing envelopes and cartons, not to mention a wall full of other postal goodies - note paper, envelopes, and the like.

But the best part is the service, which is fast (no doubt helped by all that automation), courteous and friendly. And the facility itself - which is clean, open and efficient. Which just goes to prove that there are, after all, some federal agencies out there that seem to know what they are doing!

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Speaking of Christmas stress, one would think there's already enough commercialism about the season without anyone's going out of his or her way to add even more. Yet that appears to be what is happening with Saipan's attempts to decorate for the Christmas season. Every Christmas decoration - be it the lights strung from tree to tree over the road or the lighted images along the side of the road - comes complete with the name of its sponsor.

Obviously, someone is trying to make a point: that the decorations are not coming from some politicians' private slush fund. But a simple statement to that effect, or a list in the papers, or the plaque that has been put up on Beach Road, would have been enough. Do we really need to have every single one of those decorations commercialized?

Even the fact that some of the sponsors are not-for-profits - like the schools - seems un-Christmas-like, too competitive in spirit. Their sponsor-ship should be acknowledged, of course, but does it have to be part of the decoration?

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Most unChristmas-like, unfortunately, is the continuing stream of mis-information being carried by the press - most notably the <I>Variety</I> - concerning matters related to the PCB clean-up in Tanapag, not to mention the tacit cooperation in perpetuating those mis-truths by government officials whose ethical duty would seem otherwise.

Where is the correction to the unfounded scare about yam and taro contamination triggered by the numerical games played by the Attorney-General's consultants in their report to the Legislature? Where is the clarification of the false rumor that Tanapag residents' blood samples were tested for the "wrong" substance, released to the press by an Assistant Attorney General? Where, in the AG's office, is the logic, reason and common sense that would support, rather than criticize, potential defendants for hesitating to speak with potential prosecutors without their own attorneys present?

If the players won't play fair, is it too much to ask the press to do so, to stop reporting the rumors without first checking the facts?

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If you're frustrated that you can't read the <I>Variety</I> on-line (as you can its competitor, the <I>Tribune</I>), you might want to contact the <I>Variety</I>'s editor, Abed Younis, at younis@gtepacifica.net, and ask him what his plans are for putting his paper on line.....

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I have found one mention of a January 1, 2001 celebration of the millennium: the U.S. Naval

Observatory in Washington, D.C. plans to ring in the new millennium with an open house on New Year's Eve, and will be dropping a replica of an historic "time ball" from the Observatory's main building at the stroke of midnight, according to a story in the <I>Pacific Daily News</I>. Between 1845 and 1936, the ball was dropped every day at noon "when the city's inhabitants and the ships of the Potomac needed to know the precise time," the story says. They may not need it any more but such an indicator sure would be useful in the CNMI, where knowledge of the precise time is not all that easily accessible to everyone. But then, maybe it isn't all that necessary to know the precise time out here....., it can take pride in the small role it played in bringing to a successful conclusion a long struggle by the UN Environment Program's Fifth Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee meeting to put together a treaty banning persistent organic pollutants (POPs).

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