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Facts, Not Fears, Solve Problems

A BUSINESS magazine reports that some 3 million speeches, addresses, remarks and other forms of post-meal verbosity are delivered each day to audiences of Americans gathered for an infinite number of reasons, or for no reason at all.

Occasionally, one of these speakers says something worth remembering. Such a speech was made last fall by John J. McKetta, E. P. Schock professor, chemical engineering, University of Texas, and chairman of the National Air Quality Commission.

McKetta's speech, "The Eight Surprises, or Has the World Gone to Hell?" is still being circulated by energy industry leaders.

McKetta's first "surprise" is that we don't depend upon oxygen produced by photosynthesis, as was long supposed. This process produces just enough oxygen to convert plant tissue back to the carbon dioxide and water from which it came.

A more likely source of oxygen, he says, involves the photodissociation of water vapor in the upper atmosphere by high energy rays from the sun and by cosmic rays. "If all the organic material on earth were oxidized, it would reduce the atmospheric concentration of oxygen by less than 1 per cent," he estimated.

McKetta declared that true measurements show that there is no difference in carbon monoxide (CO) amounts between the hemispheres and that the overall concentration in the air is not increasing at all, in spite of millions of vehicles on the road.

Furthermore, most oxides of nitro-

gen come from nature. If man were to be 100 per cent successful in removal of oxides of nitrogen from combustion gases, we would still have more than 99 per cent left in the atmosphere.

Raising a "big question mark" about whether DDT or other chlorinated compounds are endangering lives of mankind and some bird species, McKetta said "It's quite possible that the desirable properties of DDT so greatly outnumber the undesirable ones that it might prove to be a serious mistake to ban entirely this remarkable chemical."

As surprise No. 6, McKetta insists that man has had nothing to do with the disappearance of millions of species of animals that preceded his appearance on earth. In spite of all-out war on certain undesirable species of insects, man has not been suc-

cessful in eliminating a single insect species.

Then he cited examples to show that nature's "pure water" is not so pure, after all, and that all of man's air pollution during his thousands of years of life on earth does not equal the amount of particulate and noxious gases from just three volcanoes, which he named.

His eighth and last surprise is that "we are not on the brink of ecological disaster." McKetta declares flatly that a large percentage of the pollution that exists is natural and would be here whether or not man was on earth.

These observations come from a recognized scientist whose responsibilities include extensive study of the subject. His conclusion that we should use our knowledge and not our fears to solve the real problems makes sense.