

## BOOK REVIEW

# Much needed perspective on environmental health risks

*'Hold It!' brightens horizon for effective and efficient solutions*

## **HOLD IT!: The Case for Hard Thinking, Honesty and Humility when Assessing Environmental Health Risks**

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Stairway Press, \$19.95

**By Anthony J. Sadar**

**P**erspective is an absolute necessity when understanding environmental issues. Unfortunately, all too often understanding on this critical topic is limited to a narrow narrative.

Help with improving understanding and alleviating misinformation is "Hold It!: The Case for Hard Thinking, Honesty and Humility when Assessing Environmental Health Risks" by environmental engineers E. Joseph Duckett and Jeffrey L. Pierce. The authors have a combined 100 years of experience which includes extensive work in the energy sector along with environmental health, regulations, controls and management projects.

From their mature vantage point, in "Hold It!" Mr. Duckett and Mr. Pierce deliver an objective analysis of some of the major environmental issues of our time such as climate change, air toxic pollution, water contamination and energy-sector emissions. "Hold It!" is "for realists in pursuit of environmental and human health improvement. It can be considered CPR for environmental panic attacks or a splash of humility to make us think twice before lunging at popular, often simplistic, solutions."

"Hold It!" is an easy and quite engaging read in ten succinct chapters. It is "an attempt to stake out a middle zone among a variety of environmental and health issues, both past and present. Its aim is toward realism and truth with a call for humility. 'Hold It!' recognizes that environmental threats should neither be exaggerated nor simply dismissed. It is pro-science but recognizes that scientific conclusions must evolve as learning progresses."

To this end, the book proffers practical information and examples on what does and does not make sense regarding protecting the planet and people from adverse consequences. "Notable Successes" are featured in Chapter 3 and include actions taken to reduce airborne lead and asbestos and to reduce pathogens in drinking water. Conversely, in Chapter 8, "Myths" of the impact of recycling on material shortages and that fracking is a net environmental problem are addressed. In addition, an extensive, detailed discussion on the claim that pollution is worse now than in the distant past and the idea that renewable electric power is problem-free are also tackled in this chapter with supporting, straightforward technical documentation.

Other chapters reveal exaggerated risks, unintended consequences, regulatory

overreach and marketing gimmickry that greenwash consumer products and corporate activities.

Chapter 2 on "Historical Misconceptions" documents with ample figures past advertisements that were misleading at best and downright harmful to health at worst. Ads are shown for cocaine toothpaste drops (for an instantaneous relief of children's teething pain), sanitized tapeworms (to keep you thin), nutritious beer (to perk up and maintain the health of young mothers and their babies) and beneficial cigarettes (after all, doctors, scientists and educators smoke them).

One ad claims, "According to repeated nationwide surveys ... more doctors smoke CAMELS than any other cigarette!" "Hold It!" displays the magazine ad, but I remember this same ad on television in the 1960s. Smoking back then was ubiquitous ... and bad, but few challenged its health effects. My father and favorite uncle, both avid smokers, died too early from its effects.

In the final chapter, "Hold It!" presents some ideas "for re-infusing realism and honesty into environmental decision-making with the goal of improving human health and natural resources rather than promoting special business/political interests." Solutions include environmental dispatching where large pollution sources like steel industries and power plants control their emissions more during adverse atmospheric conditions such as during temperature

inversions that produce stagnant air which prevents the quick dispersal of air contaminants. (This approach is already in place in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, area by the Allegheny County Health Department for local substantial emission sources.)

Or, cross-boundary regulation to address environmental challenges that bypass state and country borders and require serious intergovernmental cooperation with measurable, sustained actions to alleviate major ecological issues like mercury contamination, acid precipitation and potentially catastrophic climate modification. Additional reasonable solutions are advanced in the concluding chapter to deal with other tenacious environmental challenges.

"Hold It!" stays true to its subtitle, delivering on hard thinking, honesty and humility, and asserts that "unrushed judgment and scientific humility apply across the environmental-health spectrum."

Ultimately, "Hold It!" widens the narrative and brightens the horizon for effective and efficient solutions to environmental health risks.

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