



Reducing the Averages: The Founding and Development of the Puget Sound Air Pollution Control Agency

James Pearson

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Book Description: In 1967, the public clamor for more stringent air pollution control had increased throughout the nation. As a result, the Puget Sound Region was granted a new multi-county air control agency. After staffing it and developing regulations, personnel began ticketing pollution sources, beginning with the most onerous. A real-time monitoring network was installed and the staff began routine dispersion modeling. Indirect source controls "bombed" and were canceled. Friction developed with the State air control agency over jurisdiction. The U.S. EPA, while supportive, was maddeningly slow to act. But successful control programs succeeded in reducing ozone ("smog"), carbon monoxide, and particulate matter to healthful levels. The biggest challenge was the control of the ASARCO Copper Smelter in Tacoma, which had gradually reduced its sulfur dioxide (SO₂) and arsenic emissions under variance. As its last variance expired, ASARCO elected to close, largely for economic reasons, and SO₂ became a non-problem. The staff continued its basic programs, adding asbestos and wood stove control. In its 20th year, dissatisfaction on the part of the staff resulted in personnel changes, and the agency began to look more like the U.S. EPA. By the early 1990's, all health standards were successfully met.

Author's Bio: After a varied engineering career, Jim Pearson entered a new field with a brand new agency, and candidly admits having made mistakes learning the new business. He worked 22 years as an engineer for the agency, the last 10 years of which were as Chief of the Engineering Division. He holds BS and MS degrees in Civil Engineering, and is a registered professional engineer.

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