

What Is "Acid Rain"?

The so-called "acid rain" issue has been used for many years to press for more regulations and restrictions on the activities of citizens throughout America. Alarmists claim that acid rain has wiped out fish in many lakes and streams, destroyed forests, ruined crops and buildings, and that it poses a serious threat to human health.

What is referred to as "acid rain" is simply rain that has absorbed airborne particles from both natural and manmade sources. Although some groups continue to try to scare Americans with stories of acid rain, scientific evidence shows that these stories are greatly exaggerated.

The truth is that after a decade of research, scientists have concluded that the so-called threat of acid rain is largely nonexistent.

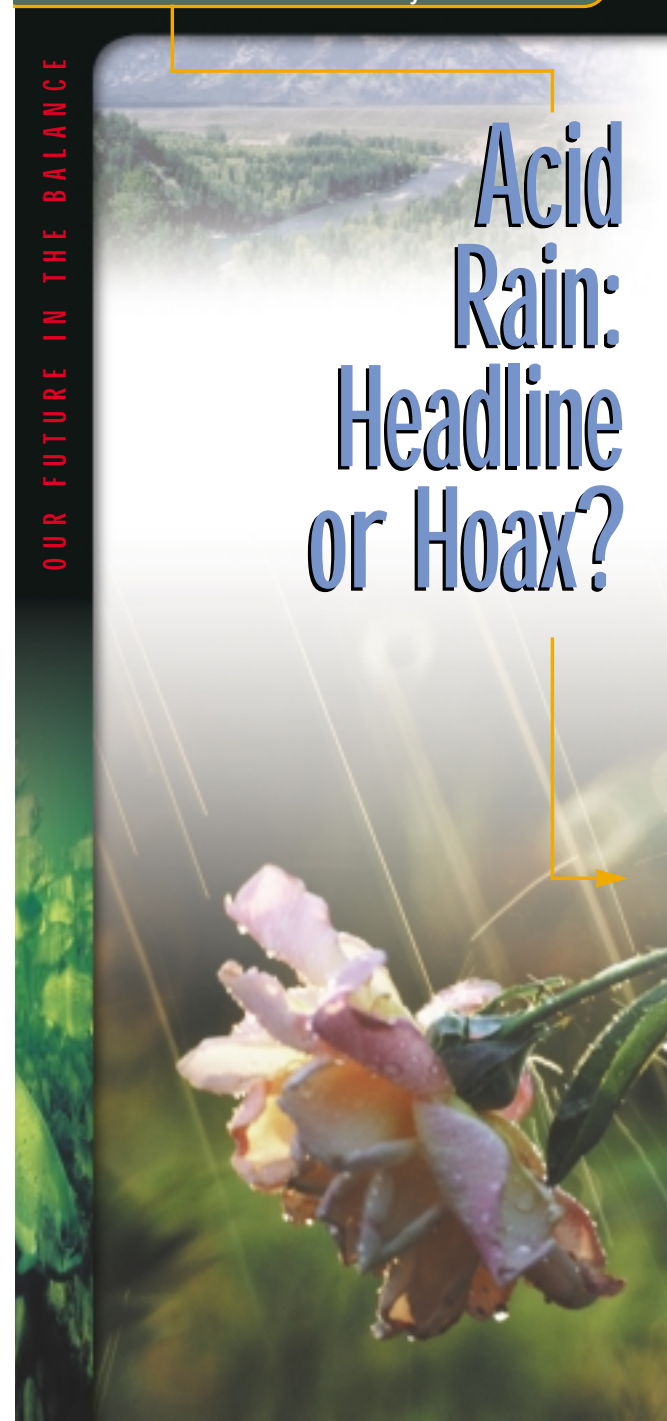


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OUR FUTURE IN THE BALANCE

Acid Rain: Headline or Hoax?



Is There a Threat?

Science vs. Scare Tactics

In 1990, the federal government completed a 10-year, \$537 million study to determine whether or not acid rain posed a threat to the environment and human health. This study, called the National Acid Precipitation Assessment Program (NAPAP), involved 700 top scientists, and was one of the largest studies ever undertaken. This study found that special interest scare-mongering over "acid rain" was not based on facts, that acid rain caused very little damage to the environment, and that it posed virtually no risk to human health. In fact, Dr. James R. Mahoney, the director of the study, said that: "The more extreme views in both directions expressed by individual scientists and the media have been rendered unlikely to be correct."

The NAPAP study found that in the entire United States less than 5 percent of lakes and 10 percent of streams had high levels of acidity, and that some of this occurred naturally. While a small number of fish were affected by acid levels in lakes, only about one-third of this was caused by any kind of acid rain. The study found that forests were barely affected. Only one species of tree affected by acid rain was identified,

and even these trees experienced only "a reduction in cold tolerance...at high elevations." As for the rest of America's forests, the study found that "the majority of North American forests are healthy." In terms of damage to crops and buildings, the study found that "there is currently no widespread forest or crop damage in the U.S. related to [acid rain]" and that the effects of acid rain on the condition of buildings could not be determined because so many other factors, such as the quality of routine maintenance, were involved.

Most importantly, the NAPAP study found that "acid rain" posed virtually no threat to human health. The study also found that special interest groups had simply assumed that there was a threat to humans, but that this had not been clearly demonstrated. The director of the study stated that any effects on human health "appear to be important only in isolated, unusual cases."

The study found that acid rain posed little threat to the environment and virtually no risk to public health.

Common-Sense Solutions

Despite the conclusions of the study, Congress passed costly acid rain regulations in 1990. Moreover, the EPA and special interest groups continue to treat acid rain as though it were a major risk to the environment and public health. However, a low-cost, common-sense solution is available to deal with the most important area of concern, the effect of acid rain on lakes and streams. The NAPAP study listed several cases where adding lime to lakes brought down acid levels dramatically. If this solution were used more often, problems with acid levels in every lake in the Northeast could be solved for less than \$500,000 per year, a fraction of the cost of current regulations.

Despite the attempts by some to scare Americans, acid rain is not a justification for costly new regulations that will do little but expand the power of government.

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