

Editor, Times-Dispatch:

Regarding the issue of pollution allowances recently permitted for auction (December 9th, "State Oks auction of pollution allowances") I would like to offer a broader perspective. The very notion that society has 'evolved' past the point of tacit acceptance of pollution as the by-product of our energy production systems (and nearly all human systems for that matter) to one where we're actually trading the "right" to pollute represents the crux of practically all environmental issues. Furthermore, regardless of the 'good' intentions, intricacies and convolutions of the federal policies that allow for such thinking, there is little distinction between this and other sorts of ecologically nonsensical endeavors such as 'wetlands mitigation' (trading destruction "rights") and carbon trading, and is yet another glaring example of the detachment between us and the natural systems on which we depend.

While it's inevitable that new power plants will continue to come on line, there's a more poignant implication in my commentary – and I aim it especially at the younger generation of readers, who I believe are our only chance at a course correction. To paraphrase a query first posed by Rachel Carson's in her seminal *Silent Spring* over 40 years ago,

"...where in the Bill of Rights does it say we have the 'right' to pollute in the first place?" Though the book is largely considered the progenitor of the environmental movement, this particular question is not one that has permeated the dialogue in any significant way; it has simply been a matter of course in the industrial economy that its ill effects are part of the price we pay for the benefits and conveniences yielded and all we have to

do is regulate. What pollution actually represents is the externalization of the true costs of production in order that profits can be internalized for maximum gain. However, Ms. Carson's radical notion isn't without precedent. In New York Back in 1888, *The Rivers and Harbors Act* banned the discharge of pollutants into all navigable waterways, and it was this law that was invoked by the people of the Hudson back in the mid-60's to sue the big corporations that were responsible for the near total destruction of that river; in fact, we can trace the origin of our own (James) Riverkeeper program back to that statute.

Great progress has been made since those days with regard to awareness, but we seem to be amenable only to reducing impacts rather than considering ways of eliminating the very concept of harmful waste to begin with. If this seems incredible, one should reflect on the fact that humans are the only species on the planet that has a sustained polluting effect as a result of fulfilling basic needs. Credit-debit balancing works within financial accounting systems, but it is not so black and white in ecological terms and it is only a matter of time before the debts we incur become unbearable for future generations unless we begin to change our perspective.