



When Smoke Ran Like Water: Tales Of Environmental Deception And The Battle Against Pollution

By Devra Davis

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In *When Smoke Ran Like Water*, the world-renowned epidemiologist Devra Davis confronts the public triumphs and private failures of her lifelong battle against environmental pollution. She documents the shocking toll of a public-health disaster—300,000 deaths a year in the U.S. and Europe from the effects of pollution—and asks why we remain silent. For Davis, the issue is personal: Pollution is what killed many in her family and forced some of the others, survivors of the 1948 smog emergency in Donora, Pennsylvania, to live out their lives with impaired health. She describes that episode and also makes startling revelations about how the deaths from the London smog of 1952 were falsely attributed to influenza; how the oil companies and auto manufacturers fought for decades to keep lead in gasoline, while knowing it caused brain damage; and many other battles. *When Smoke Ran Like Water* makes a devastating case for change.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Davis, one of the world's leading epidemiologists and researchers on environmentally linked illness, writes about her lifelong battle against environmental pollution in strong prose, underlined with some horrifying stories. With a special emphasis on air pollution and its long-term effects, Davis anecdotally talks about some of the most infamous smogs and fogs of all time, including the Donora Fog (October 26, 1948) that left a small zinc-factory town in Pennsylvania blanketed in a thick, toxic fog for over a week. "Within days, nearly half the town would fall ill" and within one 24-hour period 18 people had died. She argues that these incidents are underreported because the industries responsible for the pollutants are often powerful corporations or the major employer in these small towns. Research into the long-term effects of pollution, such as breast and testicular cancer, reveals that people in the Northeast (including Long Island and Connecticut) and in California have a higher incidence of serious illnesses. Most importantly, Davis brings to the fore the long-lasting effects of growing up and living in a polluted atmosphere, clearly demonstrating that "people living in areas with the dirtiest air had the highest risk of dying." She sounds the warning bell loud and clear: the threat to public health is real. This is an enlightening, engrossing read (with an intro by Gaynor, a leading oncologist at the Weill-Cornell Medical College in New York City), which should be on the shelf of anyone who cares about the environment and wants to learn more about policy, health and politics; Davis weaves all of these together with grace.

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From Library Journal

Epidemiologist Davis documents the struggle to force the auto, oil, coal, and chemical industries to come to terms with the environmental consequences of their unregulated release of toxic substances into our air and water—in particular high cancer rates, heart and lung diseases, infertility, brain damage, and death. She sets the stage by describing the perpetual health problems and deaths in her home town of Donora, PA, caused by toxins from coal, steel, and zinc processing. Her accounts of the devastating black smog that blanketed the town for several days in 1948 and other black smogs in Liege, London, and Los Angeles reveal the global nature of the problem. This is an expos on how industrial polluters deceived the public, belittled scientists and academics, and pressured government agencies to stifle regulations. Davis acknowledges that today's environmental regulations are a tribute to those who fought the polluters and demanded change, but the battle continues. Recommended for all environmental and public health collections; for additional coverage of this issue, see also Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner's *Deceit and Denial: The Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution* and Sandra Steingraber's *Living Downstream: An Ecologist Looks at Cancer and the Environment*.

Irwin Weintraub, Brooklyn Coll. Lib., New York

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From Scientific American

Davis tackles the subject of environmental pollution on two fronts, one personal and one professional. The first contains insight into her own life, starting from her roots in the metalworking town of Donora, Pa.—where the smog from pollution killed 20 outright in October 1948 and had lasting ill effects in townspeople, some fatal, in the months and years that followed. Her vivid descriptions of deadly smog in London as recent as the mid-1950s give the reader perspective about the inherent perils of industrial pollution to the public at large. An epidemiologist by training, Davis also chronicles the growing awareness of the spread of breast cancer (and pollution as a possible cause) in the 1990s, sterility and testicular cancer in men, and the impact of pollution on climate change. Although her prose relies heavily on statistics and historical accounts of

pollution, Davis's personal narrative ties the story together nicely.

Editors of Scientific American

Users Review

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