

A Dec. 7, 1981 editorial in the *Washington Post* comments on the reported scientific "creation – there is no better word" of a new bacterium capable of metabolizing the toxic herbicide 2,4,5-T. Possibly this organism will be able to decontaminate waste dumps and agricultural areas where the herbicide has been heavily sprayed. "It should be possible," the *Post* notes, "to use this new organism together with the herbicide to gain the weed killer's useful impact without its harmful side effects. And the method for creating the bacterium should be usable in creating any number of others with equally unique appetites." The achievement, the *Post* notes, illustrates why it is so important to stop the world's accelerating loss of species. "Scientists can find genes in nature's extraordinary diversity that are capable of doing almost anything," says the editorial. "Using the techniques of genetic engineering, these can be selected and combined into useful new organisms. But scientists cannot design the genes themselves: for this they have to rely on nature. Nature's raw material – the 5 million to 10 million plant, animal and microbial species that inhabit the earth – is being lost at a ruinous rate."