

Leslie Roberts, editor of the News and Comments section of **Science**, devoted his section in the March 15, 1991 issue to discussing the fallout from the government's massive acid rain program. NAPAP (National Acid Precipitation Assessment Program) involved some 2000 scientists and half a billion dollars over a decade to create "an impressive body of scientific research," Roberts said, but in terms of policy, he quotes one congressional aide as calling it "totally irrelevant." Others have said that although NAPAP may have fallen short of its policy goals, its scientific research helped define the parameters of the debate early in the decade.

Roberts suggests that the program never really recovered after publishing a 1987 interim report "that was widely perceived as a biased attempt to downplay the problem – a sobering reminder of just how fragile credibility can be when dealing with such a highly emotional issue as acid rain. More than that, however" Roberts adds, "NAPAP strove for scientific perfection and lost policy relevance in the bargain."

"Scientific overkill?" asks the caption next to a picture of the five feet tall stack of 6000 pages – the final NAPAP report. James Mahoney, who directed the program, says that with the benefit of hindsight, he would have directed some of the resources away from NAPAP's enormously complicated atmospheric transport model toward "simpler models that could have provided answers sooner" and warned the Interagency Committee on Earth and Environmental Sciences that "Global change is driven by too much raw science." The NAPA scenario, he indicated, is already repeating itself in the new federal climate change program.