to the editor

Regulating leaded gasoline

In the article "NO_2 standards—Practical problems remain" (SN: 7/3/71, p. 8) you state that the EPA will not ban the use of leaded gasoline unless toxicity from lead emissions can be proven. You then cite the problem of catalyst poisoning with leaded fuel.

The EPA has repeatedly stated that it anticipates regulating the addition of lead to gasoline on the basis of one or both of the provisions of law (Sec. 211c, Clean Air Act, as amended) that authorize such regulations. Sec. 211 (c)(1)(A) deals with public health and welfare considerations; Sec. 211 (c)(1)(B) deals with the effect of fuel additives on emission control devices such as catalysts.

The EPA is currently making the studies required under the act, to allow the Administrator to make such findings as may be warranted. If taking lead out of gasoline is the most cost-effective way of meeting emission standards, the EPA will take action to bring this about regardless of the final conclusions on the health hazards caused by the lead emissions themselves.

John T. Middleton
Deputy Assistant Administrator
for Air Programs
Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Air Programs
Rockville, Md.

(SCIENCE NEWS *was unaware of Sec. 211(c)(1)(B). Our conclusion was based on an* EPA *press conference held by Dr. Middleton and another* EPA *official. Intentionally or otherwise, these two officials stressed the other section—that is, the one that would allow banning of lead in gasoline on the basis of toxicity—and did not stress the fact the additive could be banned if it interfered with emission controls. At any rate, we are happy to have the matter clarified.—Ed.)*

Lasers and fusion

I find it surprising that there has been no mention in SCIENCE NEWS of the projected process for obtaining power from the fusion of heavy hydrogen as described in the lead article in SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN for June 1971, written by two scientists at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

They believe that fusion of a frozen pellet of heavy hydrogen one centimeter in diameter in the center of a large, thick-walled steel sphere filled with molten lithium can be accomplished directly in a billionth of a second by an intensely powerful single wave of greatly amplified light from a laser.

Since they say at the very end of their article, "There are, of course, many other difficult development problems, but none appears so difficult as to raise doubts about the feasibility of the concept," one would expect a great spread of publicity concerning this article.

In the July 3 SCIENCE NEWS there is a single sentence on page 10 reading, "In current experiments the energy is delivered by a beam of laser light," which might be construed as the most meager of references to the article in SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN. SCIENCE NEWS also goes on to say, "A group of Russians . . . present a theoretical calculation to show that it can also be done by means of beams of electrons moving at relativistic speeds."

Paul Estle
Cohoe, Alaska

(We refer Mr. Estle to Science News: 4/19/69, p. 384 and 10/17/70, p. 323. —Ed.)

An Am-metric system

When we adopt a metric system to conform to the rest of the world (SN: 8/7/71, p. 92), why can't we add a few familiar American units, modified slightly to fit exactly into the old metric system?

A new metric-inch of exactly 25 millimeters, a new metric-foot of exactly 300 millimeters, and a metric-yard of just 900 millimeters, would make the standard meter exactly 40 of the new metric-inches. These new units would be more easily accepted by the general public than strange metric units. The slight alterations of less than 2 percent would hardly be noticed, and these new Am-metric units are readily converted.

A slightly larger (5 percent) change could create a new metri-quart of exactly one liter, and a metri-gallon of exactly four liters. Even this difference would hardly be noticed by most shoppers. The metric-pound of 500 grams would be about 10 percent heavier, but easily acceptable. The corresponding metric-ton is already in use, for many years.

Educating the public to "think metric" seems to be a major problem in making the change-over. With a few familiar units added, it should not take the 10 years President Nixon has suggested. Why not make it quick and easy?

Dow O. Whelan
Phoenix, Ariz.

(In metric countries some traditional units do survive: the pound (livre, Pfund) defined as one-half kilo and the cup (verre), 240 milliliters, but the deliberate invention of new ones seems supererogatory to us.—Ed.)

Heroin addicts

I recently read Mr. Lionel L. Taylor's letter (SN: 7/17/71, p. 36) entitled "Eliminating the White Plague," and was shocked. I did not think that anybody could have such thoughts in our society. Does society say to those who are suffering from cancer that scientific research can wait so you may die to reduce the surplus population?

I applaud Mrs. Edna M. Travis for her letter (SN: 7/31/71, p. 72) entitled "Helping those in distress." I agree with her completely.

Ronald Peter Altrui
New York, N.Y.

I heartily agree with Lionel L. Taylor's suggestion of how to eliminate the White Plague.

C. P. Smith
Kenmore, N.Y.

Film for rent, not free

In the issue (SN: 7/31/71, p. 77) you listed one of our films: "Tobacco: The Idiot's Delight" as available for free-loan. As a result, we have been inundated with phone calls requesting this film, which is *only* available on a Rental and/or Sale basis. The rental fee is: $22 per day, or for sale at $350.

J. S. Hecht
Association-Sterling Films
New York, N.Y.

Address communications to Editor, Science News, 1719 N Street, N.W. Washington, D. C. 20036