

NAS suggests extension of emission deadline

Emission standards for automobiles have occasioned a great deal of controversy, and an alleged failure by the Environmental Protection Agency to interpret the 1970 clean air amendments as stringently as they might be has incurred the wrath of environmentalists. The irony here is that EPA may be following a more radical course than the environmentalists: Instead of insisting on high emission standards, it appears the Federal agency may instead insist on restricting the numbers of automobiles in cities, or even on banning them altogether from certain urban areas.

Such actions would have far larger environmental benefits than cleaning up urban air—as large a benefit as that might be. Keeping autos partially out of cities could help reduce the noise, congestion and social alienation that mark so many urban areas.

So the release last week of the first semiannual report of the motor vehicle emissions committee of the National Academy of Sciences was not the major news story it might have been a year ago. Predictably enough, the report suggests that a one-year extension of 1975 emission standards (possible under the 1970 amendments) “would enable manufacturers to significantly improve the performance and reliability of vehicles equipped to meet the requirements in the hands of the consumer.” Also predictable was the report’s finding that major problems exist in keeping the sophisticated emission controls maintained in use and in providing sophisticated equipment to regulatory bodies for inspection of cars. □

A scientific look at Vietnam veterans

When Johnny comes marching home again he will have to make a difficult transition back to civilian life. Chief among his problems are high rates of unemployment, mixed reactions to his role in a controversial war and possibly a drug problem. The Veterans Administration, however, believes that the seriousness of these problems has been exaggerated by the guilty conscience of the civilian population.

Donald E. Johnson, Administrator of Veterans Affairs, commissioned Louis Harris and Associates to conduct a research survey to assess the problems of the returning Vietnam veteran. Results of the survey were released last week in Washington by Johnson and Harris. The survey—conducted last summer for \$175,000—found that the American public and employers are aware of how veterans should be treated but feel guilty

about the way they are being treated. The veterans, on the other hand, seem less preoccupied with the way things should be and are content to accept things as they are.

On the drug problem, the survey found strong evidence that the public is willing to conjure special circumstances explaining drug usage in the service—pressures of war, frustration of being in Vietnam. The veterans themselves explain it as a common, everyday occurrence resulting from boredom and related reasons. Using a secret questionnaire, the survey found that 21 percent of the veterans used marijuana and 4

percent used harder drugs while in the service. These findings are in line with Department of Defense urinalysis tests and are much lower than civilian estimates.

The findings were based on interviews conducted with the members of 1,490 households (representing a cross-section of the public), with 2,300 veterans and with 786 business executives (prospective employers). Harris said that the populations were scientifically selected and are truly representative. Added Johnson, “We will use this scientific basis to improve services to veterans.” □

Nursing home fires: The heat's on



Edison Fire Dept.

Nursing home fire in Edison, N.J.: All 74 patients evacuated without injury.

Statistics suggest there are probably no more fires in nursing homes than in other institutions, and certainly less than in private homes. What makes nursing home fires so devastating is that residents are often invalids and helpless.

Last autumn the nation experienced two tragic nursing home fires—one in Salt Lake City in which six elderly persons died and one in Honesdale, Pa., in which fifteen persons died. Fire protection in nursing homes thus continues to be an urgent issue. A House subcommittee headed by Rep. William Randall (D-Mo.) looked into the causes of the Pennsylvania fire, and incorporated its findings into a report on problems of the aged, to be published by the Senate Government Operations Committee in early February. Also a Senate subcommittee headed by Sen. Frank Moss (D-Utah) has held several hearings on nursing home fires in recent months and is now preparing a report for the Senate Committee on Aging.

One of the more disturbing truths to emerge from the nursing home fires is that life safety protection varies drastically among the some 20,000 institutions around the country. The Life Safety Code of the National Fire Protection Association requires an automatic sprinkler system in one-story com-

bustible structures and in multistory noncombustible structures. Nursing homes in 24 states must adhere to the code. Those homes qualifying as Medicare “extended care facilities” must too. Yet because sprinklers can cost 10 times as much as smoke sensors—engineer Richard Patton of Freehold, N.J., estimates piping in water for a sprinkler can run \$50,000, even \$70,000 in some instances—many nursing homes have installed sensors instead of sprinklers. There is some question, though, whether fire sprinkler costs actually run that high. Also contended is the significance of sprinkling costs within the over-all costs of running a nursing home (SN: 10/16/71, p. 262).

There is even more controversy over what constitutes life safety. As might be expected of an association representing mostly profit-making nursing homes, the American Nursing Home Association says sprinklers may not be the best life protectors. Smoke inhalation, this group declares, caused the deaths in both the Honesdale and Salt Lake City fires. “Absolutely true,” the NFPA responds. Yet there is absolutely no evidence, the NFPA declares, that smoke sensors would save lives better than sprinklers. The Honesdale institution had only fire extinguishers; the Salt

Lake City home, a heat detector. Neither home, the NFPA asserts, adhered to the NFPA code. In fact, the association, which represents 25,000 firemen, fire departments, sprinkler manufacturers, smoke detector manufacturers among others, reports few fires have occurred in nursing homes that meet the code. The NFPA says it has case histories to back its statements.

As might be expected the truth probably lies somewhere between the assertions of the NFPA and the ANHA. Richard Bland, engineering professor at Pennsylvania State University and chairman of the President's Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, points out that sensors have the advantage of alerting people to a fire, whereas sprinklers do not. However detectors are predicated on nursing home staffs' being trained to evacuate residents and on residents' being able to move quickly—which is often not the case in nursing institutions. Nursing homes must also contend with patients' emotions. The NFPA has documented cases in

which patients tried to run back into burning homes after being evacuated, to rescue a cherished blanket or object. Yet while Bland agrees with the NFPA's position that only sprinklers will put a fire out, he affirms that temperatures needed to set off sprinklers are sometimes too high for patient safety. What is needed, Bland concludes, is a fire extinguishing system whose mission is life safety—and that nursing homes can comfortably afford.

Engineer Richard Patton has come up with a sprinkler system that would probably reduce costs of installation and water supply. Yet as the NFPA points out, even this system would not provide the ultimate in protection: a sprinkler that goes off as fast as a smoke sensor. They look forward to the achievement of this feat in the near future, however.

Also more basic scientific research into fire is needed, Bland asserts—into how two fires in one room interact and into how carpets, draperies and other furnishings might be made noncombustible without emitting toxic fumes. □

Economic prejudices and equal housing

Equal opportunity in housing was impeded for years by racial prejudices. But these attitudes are changing. In 1942 only 35 percent of white Americans said they would not mind having black neighbors. In 1968, 76 percent said they would not mind. The obstacle that remains is not racial or ethnic but economic. Poor families cannot afford to leave the inner city and move to the suburbs.

To study the problem the Department of Housing and Urban Development, whose goal it is to take affirmative action to provide equal opportunity in housing, called upon the Social Sciences Panel of the National Research Council's Advisory Committee to HUD. Retired diplomat George C. McGhee is chairman of the advisory committee and Amos Hawley of the University of North Carolina is chairman of its social sciences panel. Last week at the National Academy of Sciences building in Washington they presented the panel's findings and recommendations.

The report, which draws conclusions from existing research into racial and social mixing, states that there is much evidence to show that people of different races but of similar socioeconomic levels can live peacefully together in the same neighborhood. But it says little is known about whether people of different economic levels, regardless of race, can live together. "Simultaneous efforts to reduce racial segregation and class stratification may in fact be counter productive," it suggests. It recommends that emphasis of a policy of social diversity in housing should be on improving racial mixing among persons of similar economic levels. But wouldn't excessive economic stratification lead to economic (rather than racial) ghettos?

Acknowledging that possibility, Hawley and McGhee emphasized the importance of learning more about the feasibility of economic mixing in housing. They urged that high priority be given to carefully planned experiments to determine under what conditions residential mixing of people from different economic, as well as racial, backgrounds may prove most successful.

Recently HUD and the Office of Economic Opportunity have been giving high priority to racial and socioeconomic mixing in housing projects. Hawley mentioned one experiment (Columbia, Md.) that is having promising results. But based on the NRC study, Hawley says, "We are now telling [HUD and OEO] that there is no evidence to support success in these experiments and that much more research by social scientists is needed." □

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