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**COVER:** A firespotter helicopter takes off from Bertha Hill, Idaho. Despite new equipment, the forest industry wages an uphill battle against fire, insects and environmentalists. See p. 138. (Photo: John H. Douglas)

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# to the editor

## Innovative meetings

The innovative meeting format, described by Robert J. Trotter in his interesting article (SN: 7/28/73, p. 60), is not entirely new. The Fourth National Conference on Aerospace Meteorology, May 4-7, 1970, at Las Vegas, sponsored by the American Meteorological Society and the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, used an identical format in presentation, discussion and publication of conference papers. I took part in preparations for the meeting and also provided a paper. My recollection is that the format was effective and was definitely in use, on a limited basis, prior to 1970.

Mason T. Charak  
Bethesda, Md.

## 'An unprecedented cover-up'

Your article on infant mortality in the U.S. (SN: 7/14/73, p. 20) failed to mention the most significant factors accountable for the mortality. The article states that the study by the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences offers "unprecedented insights into the causes of deaths among American newborns." The study offers, instead, an unprecedented cover-up of the main factors. The Proceeding of the First International Childbirth Conference (Box 3488, Ridgeway Stn., Stamford, Conn. 06905) are far more illuminating on the subject.

To quote from an article by Doris Haire, contained in that report: "Seldom does an American mother enter the hospital to have her baby, fully aware that the drugs and procedures which she and her baby will be subjected to during the average American delivery have gradually developed, consciously or unconsciously, for the convenience of the doctor, the nurse or the hospital and are in truth frequently not in her or her baby's best interest. . . . No one knows the degree of oxygen depletion an unborn infant can tolerate before she sustains permanent brain damage. Yet drugs which are known to cause a drop in maternal blood pressure and a slowing of the fetal heart, conditions which are associated with oxygen depletion in the unborn child, are routinely administered to childbearing women. . . ."

If one scans the list of the 14 countries ahead of the U.S. in infant sur-

vival, she will find mainly the socialist and communist countries, countries in which fee-for-"service" medicine has been eradicated, countries in which childbirth is in the hands of women. It would appear, then, that it is for those reasons that maternal and infant mortality have been so greatly reduced. In the meantime, some of us survive in a man's, rich country.

Joanne Steele  
New York, N.Y.

## Photographing the comet

I have recently enjoyed your very fine article about the coming comet Kohoutek (SN: 7/14/73, p. 24). We of the planetarium staff are, because of the article, planning to photograph the comet from 50,000 feet over Denver with special help from Gates Lear Jet.

David A. Baysinger  
Operations Manager  
Gates Planetarium  
Denver Museum of Natural History  
Denver, Colo.

## A view from Europe

As a starter, let me say, that I have now been reading SCIENCE NEWS for over two years and find it to be unequivocally the best science reporting service for quick reading that is available—still giving sufficient space also to items meriting more than superficial interest. There would be just one minor wish here: The source reference could occasionally be more complete, particularly when you consider that you probably do have many readers outside the United States who do not have easy access to address and organizational reference books.

I'd like also to comment on the letter by Jessie Chasko (SN: 7/14/73, p. 19).

I am fully of the same opinion, but would only add that licensing of parenthood (SN: 5/12/73, p. 305) is already a fact: The conditions and requirements for adoption parents are not only very strict and properly very thorough, but they are out of all proportion to the free license granted to all others, married or not, to reproduce. I see no reason why similar standards and qualifications should not be required of so-called natural parents.

Christopher R. Landmann  
Stuttgart, Germany

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