

Science[®] News

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Incorporating Science News Letter

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COVER: Comet Kohoutek, photographed here from a sounding rocket on Jan. 4, is far from the first of its breed to confuse the public. It is definitely the first, however, to have left such an exhaustive scientific legacy. See p. 290. (Photo: NASA)

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Senior Editor and	
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Behavioral Sciences	Robert J. Trotter
Biological Sciences	Joan Archart-Treichel
Science and Society	John H. Douglas
Space Sciences	Jonathan Eberhart
Writer/Copy Editor	Lisa J. Shawver
Art Director	Dale Appleman
Assistant to the Editor	Esther Gilgoff
Books	Margit Friedrich
Advertising	Scherago Associates, Inc.
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	Fred W. Dieffenbach
	Sales Director

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May 4, 1974

SPEAKING INFORMALLY

Your mail, our mail, our new look

SCIENCE NEWS receives stacks of mail every day bringing us information from all over the world, but the letters we read with greatest interest every morning are those intended for our letters-to-the-editor column. Here is where a magazine ceases being just a one-way communications medium and enters into that more lively world of the mutual interaction of ideas. Here is where we vividly sense a feeling of a vital relationship with you, our readers.

We wince when one of you nails us to the wall about some defect in an article. We grin appreciatively at a (fortunately not infrequent) kudo. But mostly we reap the intellectual rewards of realizing that we have stimulated you to think about something in a new way, to ask a question, to share an interesting perspective with us and our other readers, to engage in a dialogue with a broad community of scientists and laymen interested in and concerned about the world of science and how it relates to all of us.

We receive far more letters than we can print; so don't take it personally if yours doesn't appear. They're all read with interest. The selection process, I must admit, is totally subjective. But here are some tips, nevertheless. Letters should be pertinent to the subject of recent articles in SCIENCE NEWS. Keep them as brief as reasonable; a letter making an important point in two paragraphs has a better chance of being published than one taking 10 paragraphs to make the same point. Any fact or point of view reported or presented in our pages is open to criticism and discussion, but be sure to fairly state the person's position; don't set up straw men (or women). Letters directed to the central point or points of an article usually have a better chance of getting published than those that deal with some minor side issue.

To the degree that space permits, SCIENCE NEWS serves as a forum for ideas about science. We like to think that in some small way you and we are all equal participants in the democratic ideal of a free and open exchange of ideas, knowledge and opinions. So continue to let us know what you're thinking. We'll try to share as many of those letters with the rest of you as possible.

* * * *

We are seeing disquieting signs of a deterioration in the postal service given SCIENCE NEWS and other publications. Some subscribers are receiving their magazines later than usual. Sometimes two or more issues arrive in the same mail. Sometimes an issue arrives after one published a week later. Other publications are noting the same problems. This bothers us because 1) being a weekly newsmagazine, we go to great pains to be current and timely and 2) we, like other publications, were hit with a whopping postage rate increase on March 1; we didn't expect less service for more money. SCIENCE NEWS is mailed from Washington each Friday, the day before the date shown on the cover. We haven't missed a mail deadline in years. If you are having problems with delayed or erratic mail delivery of SCIENCE NEWS, please help us by writing your local postmaster and sending a carbon copy to us at our editorial offices, 1719 N St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. We'll try to do what we can from this end.

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You've undoubtedly noticed some changes in the appearance of SCIENCE NEWS in the last two months. We've changed and enlarged the typeface for our headlines and article titles, made some different uses of rules and white space, given more attention to the design and layout of the longer articles, and brought in artists to draw some of our covers. The new look combines the best of several elements of both contemporary and traditional design. The goal is to give a more coherent and professional look to the magazine and to make it more attractive and readable for you. Needless to say, in content and substance we are exactly the same magazine as before, and our editorial standards remain unchanged: to strive to be the best and most authoritative source of timely scientific news available.

—Kendrick Frazier