

SCIENCE NEWS®

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Incorporating Science News Letter

OF THE WEEK

On-off switches of sleep	36
Evidence for third new particle	36
Solar brightness variable?	37
Indications of a lopsided universe	37
Status of women in developing countries	38
Biogenesis—raindrops and bubbles?	38
Actin's role in mitosis	39
NSF reorganization	39

RESEARCH NOTES

Physical Sciences	40
Behavior	42
Space Sciences	42

ARTICLES

Early care and mental health	41
How food and drugs interact	43
Telephoning by light	44
When black holes collide	46

DEPARTMENTS

Books	34
Letters	35

COVER: "Miracle fibers" developed by Bell Laboratories, one of the vital components necessary for optical communications to become a reality. Fine as a human hair, the fibers carry light literally millions of times better than any available just a few years ago. See p. 44. (Photo: Bell Labs)

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LETTERS

Banning fluorocarbons

I have just read your article on "The End of the Aerosol Age" (SN: 6/21/75, p. 396). You may find it interesting to note that Governor Straub recently signed a new law banning the sale of all aerosols containing fluorocarbons. The new law becomes effective in the spring of 1977. This makes Oregon the first state officially to ban fluorocarbons.

The aerosol industry has not been sleeping, though. I have seen considerable information lately on aerosols containing non-fluorocarbons, so I believe that the aerosol can will be with us a long time yet.

*Stephen S. Moe
Springfield, Ore.*

The fluorocarbons-ozone controversy has been discussed repeatedly in your journal and your May 17 issue devoted to it a leading article by Janet H. Weinberg.

What amazes me is that all the research mentioned is devoted exclusively to experiments on destruction of ozone and not also to the formation of ozone from oxygen under the influence of ultraviolet radiation. Any depletion of the ozone layer causing greater penetration of ultraviolet light into the atmosphere will increase the rate of ozone formation. Therefore, the ozone layer is, so to say, "self-healing."

Moreover, since the thickness of the ozone layer keeps varying with seasons and latitudes in the order of magnitude of up to 50 percent, the current estimate of possible 13-20% depletion by the year 2000 is well within the limits of natural fluctuations, which the human race successfully survived during the last few millennia.

*Dr. Jacob Rosin
Netanya, Israel*

The current concern over use of fluorocarbons as a propellant calls for a closer look at aerosols, as the Government Task Force recently confirmed. Unfortunately, aerosols refer to a great many products that offer the public important advantages—and do not use Freon.

By failing to indicate that aerosol paints, for example, are not under indictment, you harm our industry, our employees and our customers.

I ask that you correct this situation in future stories by specifically noting that aerosol paints are not included in the controversy over Freon.

Of all aerosol paints, approximately 98 percent are free of fluorocarbons. (Using almost exclusively hydrocarbons which are harmless natural gas that has been scrubbed.)

Aerosol paints offer true value along with convenience. . . . They are used primarily for small jobs—which would require a brush (mostly used once) and solvent for clean-up as well as a half-pint of paint.

The spray paint industry's problem is of small moment in the universe. It is, however, our livelihood, and we believe it is important to the public. So we would surely appreciate your making note of this.

*P. W. McKenna
President
Plasti-Kote Company
Medina, Ohio*

Mutated bacteria

The report (SN: 7/5/75, p. 8) that sewage dumped in the sea produces mutated bacteria resistant to antibiotics is very interesting in view of a recent report that chlorinated water could be mutagenic. Since sewage is by law chlorinated, any surviving bacteria could be mutated, and such mutations could be lethal—either to the bacteria or to us.

*Herbert Schwartz, Ph.D.
Adjunct Professor of Organic Chemistry
Cumberland County College
Vineland, N.J.*

Plight of railroads

I was touched by Dietrick Thomsen's article concerning railroads (SN: 5/3/75, p. 294). I find the railroad situation particularly ironic in view of the city in which I live. The origin of Atlanta can be traced back to 1833, when a small town named Terminus grew up at the southern end of a rail line. Atlanta was built on and by the railroads. The very center of the city is called "Five Points" because it was the junction of five rail lines.

Now, since two passenger rail stations were razed to make way for the Omni, only one passenger rail station in the entire five-county metropolitan area still exists, from which only three trains leave each day. Freight rail service in Atlanta has also declined. William B. Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport may be the nation's second busiest airport, but the glorious trains that created the Dogwood City are gone forever.

*Steven J. Cooper
Atlanta, Ga.*

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