

SCIENCE NEWS®

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Incorporating Science News Letter

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COVER: A diver replacing a valve on a pipeline underwater, one of the numerous jobs commercial divers working for oil companies must undertake. A national program to reduce health hazards of diving has been recommended. See p. 284. (Photo: Commercial Diving Center, Wilmington, Calif.)

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MAY 1, 1976

LETTERS

Panic over toxic chemicals

Joan Arehart-Treichel's "Off the Beat" on toxic chemicals (SN: 4/19/76, p. 221) is an excellent discussion of a point that needs to be made about the seemingly unending discoveries of "suspected" or "confirmed" carcinogens.

Many researchers apparently are trying to feather their nests and replace waning funds by following the carcinogen piper. In their research the doses used, rather than being a realistic maximum human intake, are many times multiplied. Their test animals are bred and selected purposely for tumor production, and not for accurate representation of a normal situation.

All this has its effect. Chemicals, food production and preservation, and health become political rather than factual as these "scare" data become magnified in the press. This type of unrealistic data are then often and erroneously expressed as fact, thus blackballing very safe and useful chemicals.

As an example of this, Ms. Arehart-Treichel listed DDT specifically as a carcinogen, while it is known *not* to be a carcinogen. Extensive tests, including those on DDT production workers (which revealed less than the national average cancer) have freed DDT from the cancer stigma. Yet it remains unjustly implanted in the minds of many people as a carcinogen. The same will probably be true for cyclamates, Red No. 2 and others.

A. C. Scoggan
Boise, Idaho

I am disappointed in Joan Arehart-Treichel's article on toxic chemicals. While her point regarding the preponderance of negative news coverage about chemicals in our environment and the general invalidity of the tests which incriminate such chemicals is valid and well-taken, I disagree strongly that we Americans have a "right to the pursuit of happiness" of the form she suggests. A large part of the devices and substances manufactured for the convenience of Americans are wholly unnecessary and result in a large energy and resource waste, as well as fostering the pampered, "spoiled child" attitudes of so many Americans. This attitude that we Americans are entitled to a life of convenience does not belong in SCIENCE NEWS.

David M. Miller
Santa Monica, Calif.

Gray gardens

I found Gil Friend's comments on "gray gardens" (SN: 3/6/76, p. 152) very interesting and timely and deserving of further immediate investigation. Readers should be cautioned, however, that washing your produce in mild chloroform, as he suggests, may not only remove surface contaminants and leach away nutrients, but may reduce your love's labor to rat poison. The FDA has recently proposed a ban on the use of chloroform in many home products citing tests conducted for the National Cancer Institute that showed chloroform caused kidney tumors in rats and liver cancer in mice. A list containing 2,000 products which contain chloroform may be obtained by sending \$5.80 to:

Public Records and Documents Center
Food and Drug Administration
HFC-18, 5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, Md. 20852

Ron Weber
Kalamazoo, Mich.

Vitamin C in combination

The article citing vitamin C as altering blood-test results (given in quantity) opens with a partisan crack about vitamin buffs' misconceptions (SN: 3/6/75, p. 151). I feel compelled to point out that the unnecessary controversy about vitamin C (C₆H₈O₆) arises from our human tendency to isolate things so as to render them suitable for compartmental thinking. Vitamin C does not occur isolated in nature, to be plucked off a bush in convenient tablet form. The study of nutrition requires expanding the mental process to encompass a simultaneous view of several processes, which may include catalytic and synergistic actions.

Sometimes an individual system will be low in an important nutritional element (as vitamin C), whereupon specific supplementing will produce dramatic results. That individual is likely to proclaim his "discovery" enthusiastically to others. But his friend, whose need is less specific (or completely different), may try the vitamin C without discernible benefit, then regard his adviser as a misguided health-food nut. So it comes to pass that battle lines are drawn between fadists and debunkers, while useful knowledge languishes between them. I don't know why this is, unless it's that contemplating nutrients in combination is complex, hence less attractive.

Stuart Burdick
East Palo Alto, Calif.

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