

SCIENCE NEWS®

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COVER: Master Kei Fujiwara, honored by the Japanese government as a "Living National Treasure," practices a tradition of pottery making more than a thousand years old. His famous "Bizen Ware" is created from the special clay found at the bottom of rice paddies and is fired for 12 days using only the wood of red pine, whose ash forms a natural glaze. A professor of English literature until he was in his forties, Master Fujiwara moved to a secluded hill overlooking the Inland Sea to revive the ancient technology. In a way he is symbolic of many Japanese today, caught between rapid change and love of their classical heritage. See p. 124. (Photo: John H. Douglas)

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LETTERS

A harmful formula

Your article, "Infant Formulas: Threat to the Third World?" (SN: 6/3/78, p. 357) maligned the credibility of many concerned health care workers and scientists by equating their testimony at the recent Senate Health Subcommittee hearings with the self-serving statements of infant formula makers. There are many "hard scientific" studies that show the tragic results of increased bottle feeding.

The Pan American Health Organization study, *Patterns of Mortality in Childhood* (1973), presents data from 13 Latin American projects wherein the incidence of death from diarrheal disease in one- to five-month-old babies was 66 percent higher for infants who were weaned from breast to bottle before or during that age period (p. 266). Concurring and complementary data are in Plank and Milanesi, *BULLETIN WHO* 48 (1973); Kanaaneh, *J. TROP. PED.* 18:302 (1972); Cunningham, *J. PED.* 90:5 (1977); and Knodel, *SCIENCE* 198 (Dec. 16, 1977). T. Greiner (M.S. Thesis, Cornell, 1977) found statistically significant correlations between formula promotion, early weaning and infant disease. Supportive research was presented at the Senate hearings, where Dr. N. Clavano of the Philippines discussed a four-year study of 10,000 infants and Dr. M. Carballo of the World Health Organization reviewed its study of 24,000 babies in nine countries.

This and other research belies the companies' protests about the lack of scientific evidence linking formula promotion, bottle feeding and infant mortality. On the other hand, the companies have been unable to document their claims. Sen. Kennedy's probing revealed that the companies have done no marketing segmentation studies so they can restrict formula promotion from areas where circumstances preclude its safe use. The tenor of the hearings was reflected in the comments of Dr. James Post, who since 1976 has directed a Rockefeller research project on this issue: "For eight years, the industry's critics have borne the burden of proving that there was a connection between commercial marketing practices and the infant malnutrition and morbidity. . . . These hearings seem to me to signal a turning point, because from this time forward, the sellers will have to bear the burden of proving their products are not only desired, but actually serve a public purpose in the developing world."

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Please limit letters to 250 words.

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The New Logo

SCIENCE NEWS

SCIENCE NEWS comes to you with a new look this week. The new logo gives us a cleaner, clearer look and a slightly more flexible cover format. It was designed by Art Director Dale Appleman, and she will be interested in your reactions.

The new look does not indicate any change in editorial policy. SCIENCE NEWS will continue to be its informative, reliable, interesting and readable self.

—R.J.T.

Nuclear waste storage: What if?

Your article entitled "Many Uncertainties in Storing Nuclear Wastes" (SN: 7/22/78, p. 52) prompted me to read the referenced OSTP report. You have correctly reported that the authors generated a lengthy shopping list of unanswered technical questions. Such a list gives the impression that utilizing underground waste repositories requires a giant leap in technology. Most technical experts feel this is not true and sufficient data exists to safely proceed right now. In fact Germany is currently storing high level wastes in a domed salt repository.

But the real questions for society are in risk assessment and decision making. The 70 million gallons of nuclear waste from military programs (plus 0.6 million gallons from commercial nuclear power) is being and will continue to be stored in some fashion. This waste will not disappear by focusing on geochemical, geophysical and hydrological studies. The tone of the OSTP report is to do another three to five years of study before making any decisions. The current risk of existing wastes does not diminish by studying "what if" scenarios. There is no argument that geological storage is much safer than continued storage in the current mode. Lack of policy is the focal point in both California and New York State for promoting a ban on new nuclear projects. Indecision by the federal government will lead to an eventual shutdown of all nuclear power plants, but such an event does nothing to lessen the risks from existing wastes nor does it deter the production of additional military wastes. Safety becomes a choice between alternatives, not whether a given proposal guarantees absolute safety, which it will not irrespective of the proposal being evaluated. Until the nation demands resolution of the political impasse by establishing a firm timetable for decisions, I see no resolution to an endless stream of questions. Not to decide is to decide in favor of the status quo.

William G. Tope, PE.
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