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COVER: Butterfly fish and more than 200 species of plants and animals are at home in the new living coral reef exhibit at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. The reef community is on display to the public and is in use by museum scientists to explore the physical and ecological interrelationships of the reef's many members. See p. 250. (Photo: Chip Clark, Smithsonian).

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LETTERS

Sociobiological implications of sex

I was a little surprised that no mention was made of the obvious "sociobiological" implications of Dr. Smolensky's discovery of a possible peak in human and primate sexual activity during late summer (SN: 9/6/80, p. 150). One must assume that sexual activity during late summer would result in babies in late spring, which would be the preferred time for primitive man to bear children.

Demetrios Matsakis
Washington, D.C.

Unorthodox water treatment

The article "A magnetic 'believe it or not'" (SN: 9/6/80, p. 155) reminds me that about 30 years ago the San Bruno City Engineer asked me what to make of a proposal he had received for softening the city water supply by means of magnetic rings around the water pipes at the city's pumping station. The proposal was supported by steamship companies who reported success in treating boiler feedwater.

I told the engineer that if he could give me some typical before-and-after analyses of the water for which such claims were made I would be able to offer an opinion. He said that the beneficial results were stated to be "felt," not demonstrable. At that time we dropped further consideration of the topic and San Bruno's hard water problems were treated by more orthodox methods.

David E. Paterson
San Bruno, Calif.

Toxic shock and hygiene

As a user of one of the four products most mentioned, I have been following reports of "Toxic Shock Syndrome" (SN: 9/27/80, p. 198) associated with tampon use with some interest. I note, from personal experience, that the products most implicated do seem to be the most efficient ones, and since no contamination has been found in them so far, I wonder if their efficiency might not be the problem? Since they work better, one doesn't change them as often as in the past, perhaps holding the offending agent of infection in proximity to the cervix much longer than in the past. After all, this is a nice warm, moist area in which to incubate, and the tampon traps the flow, so that it can't "sweep" out the vagina, as designed.

Also, in our culture, we are taught to wash our hands after using the bathroom, but not before. Has anyone tried to study the details of the personal hygiene habits of the victims to see if they were in the habit of adjusting the tampon with their bare hands?

S.E. Hammond
Lake Grove, Ore.

Ozone past and present

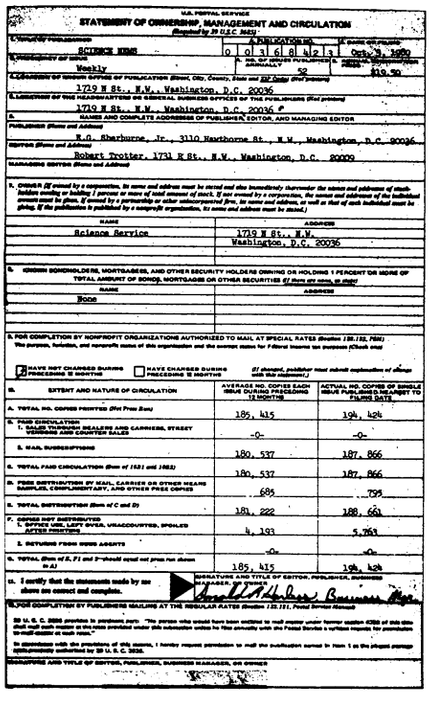
I was amazed to read the article on ozone (SN: 8/30/80, p. 134).

As a child and through my teens, I suffered terribly from hay fever and asthma. My primary treatment was to stand over an "ozone machine" and inhale the ozone, which was then considered better than pure air. It did, in fact, quickly free the congestion in my lungs and air passages and if I remained in the room with the machine, I felt absolutely great.

To read now that it is a pollutant, is somewhat astonishing, when the benefits—to me, at least—were so obvious; I would have virtually suffocated without it. I have often since wondered where I could again acquire an ozone machine for some of those occasional "bad" hay fever days that still occur but maybe I should be glad I haven't found one, to "pollute" my lungs. On the other hand, maybe everyone ought to have one to treat, or prevent, lung cancer.

R. C. Bixler
Canton, Ohio

(Years ago ozone was believed to be good for health, especially for respiratory problems. [There is even a section of New York City called Ozone Park, presumably to persuade people that there was a lot of ozone in the air there.] Possibly they thought getting three oxygen atoms instead of only two was a bargain. Today it is recognized that the chemical behavior of the three-oxygen molecule renders it "irritating to mucous membranes and toxic to human beings and lower animals" [Arthur W. Francis in The McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Science and Technology]. Maybe the machine produced something in addition to ozone. —Ed.)



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