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Letters

Farmland fading fast

The excellent articles on the problems of salt contamination of agricultural land (SN: 11/10/84, p. 298; 11/17/84, p. 314) should help make Americans aware of the value and fragility of the most precious natural resource we have: our land. Destruction of farmland by salt is just part of an even wider problem, however, since farmland is also disappearing daily under housing subdivisions and shopping malls. The problems of reclaiming salt-polluted land are simple when compared with the problems of reclaiming land that has been paved over and built on.

John Linsenmeier
Cleveland Heights, Ohio

English escalators

When entering or getting off a moving staircase ("Down the up escalator," SN: 10/13/84, p. 236), there are two things to think about: to ad-

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just to the change of movement and to avoid the crack between treads. In many North American escalators, only the end tread is at floor level; the second is moving vertically and horizontally.

A statutory requirement and marked difference is noticeable in the United Kingdom. This is the addition of a horizontal portion, 8 or 10 feet long, at the top and bottom of the stairway. The 1 or 2 seconds' respite between vertical and horizontal permits a safer approach.

I wonder whether, in the course of his studies, Professor Cohn came across any safety statistics to compare the two concepts?

John A. Williams
Mississauga, Ontario

Cohn replies: *I know of no statistics on this point. Others who have studied the problem share the view, though, that an elongated horizontal run at exit and entry should improve safety performance.*

Cold-contagion misconception

The article about disinfectant tissue ("Something to sneeze at," SN: 10/27/84, p. 267) and a subsequent letter (SN: 11/17/84, p. 318) call into question my understanding of the nature of common respiratory infections. A general practitioner informed me that 95 percent of common colds are viral and that 90 percent of viral infections are communicable before symptoms are displayed. How can disinfectant tissue be effectively used if people have no clue as to when they are contagious?

Donald E. Horton
Easthampton, Mass.

Elliott Dick, the University of Wisconsin researcher who headed the study, replies: *The question is a good one, and many people hold that belief. However, studies show that the first few days of a nice juicy cold are when you're particularly contagious. Before that, you hardly shed any virus at all.*

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