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Letters

Pass the alga seltzer?

Re "Diet for a Blue Planet" (SN: 4/6/85, p. 220)
I would like to report the following on the gas-
tronomical consumption of algae.

Some 20 years ago, it had been suggested that
algae would be ideal for food in space projects,
besides the fact of their ability to create O₂ from
CO₂. It was not long before reports were coming
in of rather severe disturbances such as abdomi-
nal cramps, diarrhea and bloating occurring in
humans within three to four days. Further re-
search by the undersigned revealed that a cer-
tain variety of algae, under conditions of radia-
tion, might cause mutations that instead of ex-
creting O₂ might produce deadly CO.

It so happens that *Anacystis nidulans* algae
notoriously do just that. (We have a rough anal-
ogy of the beneficial and lethal types in the
mushroom family.) Fortunately, since those
early years the cultivation of algae in reference

This Week

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282 Climate and Africa: Why the Land Goes Dry

Cover: False-color image from a meteorological satellite shows drought-stricken regions in Africa last August. Tan and brown areas contain almost no vegetation; red and purple depict well-vegetated zones. Through the use of such satellite and computer technology, scientists are scouting for clues to the cause and persistence of Africa's 17-year dry spell. (Photos: Advanced Very High Resolution Radiometer/NOAA; World Bank/Yosef Hadar)



Departments

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to space flight has apparently been dropped.
Science marches on.

Constantine Generales
New York, N.Y.

Asbestos from autos

In "Asbestos in babies" (SN: 3/9/85, p. 153)
you report findings suggesting insulation or
gaskets as possible sources of asbestos in de-
posits within lungs of infants. The article con-
tinues with information that autopsies on most
adults have shown pulmonary asbestos depos-
its, with no suggestion of their origin.

I would be very surprised if this seems to be a
mystery, especially to anyone familiar with the
composition of automobile brake and clutch
linings, in which well over hundreds of
thousands of pounds of asbestos are daily being
ground to a fine dust for dissemination into the

air. I am curious to know whether this has been
previously studied for its effects on some lung
disorders. It is certainly a greater source than
gaskets, which are normally pressure sealed be-
tween solid metallic or plastic material, even in
an incubator.

Willard G. Kanagy
Lafayette, La.

Africa's crisis: Ascribing blame

In your Letters section (SN: 3/30/85, p. 195)
Joseph Busey ascribes much of the drought in
Ethiopia to "centralized, Marxist/socialist re-
gimes," while William Holmes charges it to the
"collectivization of farming, aggravated by the
import of free food."

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