

SCIENCE NEWS®

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

A Science Service Publication
Volume 128, No. 13, September 28, 1985

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Subscription Department
231 West Center Street, Marion, Ohio 43305

Subscription rate: 1 yr., \$29.50; 2 yrs., \$50.00.
(Foreign postage \$5.00 additional per year.) Change
of address: Four to six weeks' notice is required.
Please state exactly how magazine is to be
addressed. Include zip code. For new subscriptions
only call (1) 800-247-2160. Printed in U.S.A. Second
class postage paid at Washington, D.C. Title
registered as trademark U.S. and Canadian Patent
Offices. Published every Saturday by SCIENCE
SERVICE, Inc. 1719 N St., N.W., Washington, D.C.
20036. (202-785-2255)
ISSN 0036-8423

Letters

Test blood, not people

Synthesizing information from two studies reported in "AIDS Blood Test: Qualified Success" (SN: 8/10/85, p. 84), I conclude that for every 1 million people whose blood is tested for AIDS, about 8,500 will test positive. Of those about 575 will also test positive on the Western blot test. Assuming the Western blot test is 100 percent specific and 100 percent sensitive, it would appear that 93 percent of those blood samples that originally tested positive are in fact false positive.

Health professionals should keep this in mind when deciding whether or not to tell blood donors of positive results. The overwhelming majority will be needlessly worried or, worse, victimized by those terrified by this horrible

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Cover: Computer simulation of a protein's structure is often the first step in protein engineering. In this representation of the enzyme called lysozyme, the active site, the catalytic region, is the triangular indentation at the bottom. (Computer graphic: Richard Feldmann, National Institutes of Health)



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killer. It must be remembered that this test is meant to clean up the blood supply, not diagnose AIDS.

*Jim Girves
Columbus, Ohio*

Disguising risks with jargon

"Ruling on nuclear waste" (SN: 8/24/85, p. 119) exposes the typical jargon that has been developed over the last 40 years and is presented to the mass media to protect the operations by the Atomic Energy Commission, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Department of Defense and Department of Energy, disguising real risks from operations of commercial reactors and the development of nuclear weapons.

"Depleted" or spent nuclear fuel is not de-

pleted or spent, because these ionizing materials contain a larger proportion of dangerous fissile materials. "Isolate" should not imply safe disposal or storage of radionuclides, because no geologist is able to guarantee constant fail-safe conditions for 10,000 years, while these radionuclides will be ionizing their environments for millions of years.

Unmined uranium ore is a poor standard for estimating leakage from a "repository" that would contain many toxic and hazardous stable chemicals as well as ionizing radwaste. After going through a nuclear fuel or weapons cycle, radionuclides are more contaminating simply because they have been disseminated into the environment occupied by biota, some of which greatly accumulate.

*Louis G. Williams
Northport, Ala.*

SEPTEMBER 28, 1985

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