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Letters

Tall tales

I cannot fathom why anyone in their right mind would consider constructing a building a mile high ("Reaching for the Sky," SN: 4/12/86, p. 234) when they can't operate what they are building today. Politics and egos are apparently prevailing over logic and economics in the operation of these buildings, whether by government or private concerns.

As a stationary engineer (maintenance supervisor) for a government project in New York State, I have seen many buildings that are operating out of control because of design problems. Someday someone should question the design engineers who laid out the controls for such buildings' heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems. I find that most buildings are overcontrolled — that is, they are not *automatically* responsive to most climatic changes.

Engineering consultant Israel A. Naman's comments were right on target about how buildings are being poorly constructed today,

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Cover: Researchers at the National Institute of Mental Health have found that when mice in an experimental colony reach several times their optimum population density, behavior regresses and reproduction ceases. The director of the rodent research further asserts that this pattern has significance for a rapidly expanding human population. (Photo: Charles River Breeding Lab, Inc.)



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even with the best of materials. But whatever flaws are in the system are usually made into bigger and more costly problems by other engineers or maintenance personnel because they don't take the time to study their buildings. I feel the design engineer should be required to run his creation for at least one year after construction is ended and the building is occupied.

Fred Krieg
Albany, N.Y.

The example of employees finding "the only way to darken a room in order to show slides was to sit perfectly still for 12 minutes at a time" or to "unscrew the light bulbs" shows that the "smart" building was managed by not-so-smart people. The smart thing to do was to wire the motion sensor so that it could be either in the "lights off" or in the "automatic" mode. This would enable the occupants wishing to view slides in a darkened room to switch off the lights and return the switch to "automatic" when finished.

I wonder what the occupants would do if the

room had no blinds or shades. Would they wait until sunset?

Joseph H. Newman
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New York, N.Y.

Professor Gerald R. Larson's comments in "The First Skyscraper" (SN: 4/5/86, p. 218) concerning the chronology of *skyscraper's* first appearance in print and the conception of the Home Insurance Building in Chicago prompt this letter. In *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, we have ascribed a date of 1883 to *skyscraper* as its earliest appearance in print. The citation possessing that date is from an article in CENTURY MAGAZINE of that year, so *skyscraper* certainly antedates the completion of the Home Insurance Building and probably most of the building's construction period as well. This information isn't new; the excerpt from the CENTURY MAGAZINE article in which *skyscraper* is used appeared in the *Dictionary of American English* in 1944.

Paul E. Cappellano
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