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## Letters

### Murphy maligned

I fear that I must take exception to your discussion of Murphy's Law ("Murphy's Lab," SN: 4/25/92, p.264).

In 1949, Captain Edward Aloysius Murphy (USAF) developed a form of the law attributed to him as a result of observing a lab technician install accelerometers backward on Major (later Colonel) John Paul Stapp's rocket sled. Murphy's law (by Captain Murphy) reads: "If there's more than one way to do a job and one of those ways will end in disaster, then someone will do it that way."

Some time later, Major Stapp put down Murphy's law as we know it today: "If anything can go wrong, it will go wrong."

With the exception of the smear of Captain Murphy's name, a nice article.

Crockett Ellis Jr.  
Phoenix, Ariz.

Anyone who has seen the residue of jumper

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Cover: Villagers on the island of Tanna in the South Pacific nation of Vanuatu exchange pigs and the decorated roots of a much-prized shrub during a ritual dance festival. Pacific islanders have long used the roots of this plant to make an intoxicating beverage called kava. Some drinkers say kava is a better antidote to stress than prescription sedatives. A trio of scientists now report on the history, chemistry and botany of kava. (Photo: Lamont Lindstrom)



### Departments

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Science Service, a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921, gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of disadvantaged groups. Through its Youth Program it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the *Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students*.

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cables that were improperly connected has seen the combined effects of Murphy's law and Ohm's law. However, Ohm did not make the current flow, and neither Murphy nor gremlins put the clamps on the wrong battery posts. Murphy's law describes human fallibility.

Reid R. Samuelson  
Eastford, Conn.

### Cure for sick buildings?

We are surprised that the experts consulted by Bruce Bower for "'Sick' Buildings Exert Stressful Impact" (SN: 4/25/92, p.260) continue to be so vague and waffling about the causes. Can this be due to disciplinary tunnel vision of psychologists, ergonomists and antipollutionists? The atmospheric electricity factor has been woefully neglected.

For several years my research colleagues and I have been recommending commercially available electron cascade effect generators, more commonly called "electron generators,"

as a highly effective "cure" for nearly every case of sick building syndrome (SBS). Parenthetically, this technology has no relation to the popular "negative ion generator."

In our investigations, we find that SBS clearly has organic causes. Stress is certainly a factor in determining individual SBS sensitivity, but the critical stress overload is almost always generated by organic factors.

The better models of "electron generators" currently on the American, European and Japanese markets are very effective in two important but distinctly different modalities: They not only precipitate airborne pollutants and infectious microorganisms out of the respiratory air, but also neutralize ambient electrical fields that cause the slow, insidious, but reversible biochemical changes that result in such a variety of symptoms (e.g. allergies, respiratory distress, headache, irritability).

Charles Wallach  
President, Behavioral Research Associates  
Canoga Park, Calif.

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