

# SCIENCE NEWS®

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

Science Service Publication  
Volume 143, No. 26, June 26, 1993

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SCIENCE NEWS (ISSN 0036-8423) is published weekly on Saturday, except the last week in December, for \$39.50 for 1 year or \$68.00 for 2 years (foreign postage \$6.00 additional per year) by Science Service, Inc., 1719 N Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Second-class postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing office. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to SCIENCE NEWS, P.O. Box 1925, Marion, OH 43305. Change of address: Four to six weeks' notice is required — old and new addresses, including zip codes, must be provided.

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1719 N St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036  
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Cover: This image from a computer simulation shows how a huge gravitational wave distorts spacetime in the vicinity of a black hole. (Image courtesy Ed Seidel, Peter Anninos, David Bernstein, David Hobill, Larry Smarr, John Towns, research; Mark Bajuk, visualization/NCSA)



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Science Service, which publishes SCIENCE NEWS, is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921. It 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 underrepresented groups. Through its Youth Programs 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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## Letters

### Cleanup funding as PR plus

In "An Otter Tragedy" (SN: 3/27/93, p.200), it says that Exxon Company USA calculated the cost to be \$18 million for the entire project. Who paid for the otter "rehabilitation" effort?

Tom Martyn  
Carmel, Ind.

Exxon. All \$18 million.

— J.A. Raloff

Exxon was far more interested in rescuing its positive public relations image than sea otters when it funded those efforts. It certainly got its money's worth.

The truth is, "cleanup and rescue" often did more harm than good. Only a tiny fraction of the spill was ever recovered or ameliorated. Ecosystems and archaeological sites were ravaged by the cleanup and its personnel. While there were well-meaning volunteers involved with the otter efforts, many researchers were overwhelmed and corrupted when heretofore scarce project monies were showered upon

them. They looked the other way when un-oiled, unendangered, but bountied otters were captured by \$4,000 per day boatmen, ignoring the trauma of implanting transmitters the size of cigarette packs into the abdomens of healthy animals.

Exxon and other oil companies understand that buying publicity, politicians, and PhDs is cheaper than prevention.

Frank Smith  
Barrow, Alaska

### Turn those PCs off!

Most, if not all, major manufacturers of personal computers will affirm that PCs are made to be turned off ("The cost of idle computers," SN: 3/20/93, p.186). The fact that 30 to 40 percent of them are left on 24 hours a day makes me believe that a bit of education will save even more than new developments in either hardware or software, especially since new hardware developments will not be incorporated into existing systems.

Also, the article leads one to believe that present systems use only about 60 watts of

power. This may be true of monitors, but PCs with hard drives and fan motors typically use about 300 watts of power when on.

M.Z. Berkowitz  
Minden, Nev.

### Ventilation fails sensitized workers

It is not surprising that office workers do not experience any change when "sick buildings" have their ventilation improved ("Sick buildings: The ventilation conundrum," SN: 3/27/93, p.198). Once workers are sensitized to formaldehyde and other volatile organic compounds, they start reacting to much lower concentrations. EPA's recommendations are ridiculously high, even for unsensitized workers. They can be dangerous for someone who has become sensitized.

Most of the people I know who are highly sensitized cannot work. In a sense, they may be the lucky ones — they no longer have to spend hours in a carcinogen-filled environment.

V. Lee Grover  
Ajo, Ariz.

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