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Editorial, Business, and Advertising Offices
1719 N St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036
202-785-2255; scinews@sciserv.org

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Letters

Healthful honey

If bees are like "flying dust mops" ("Chemical Buzz," SN: 5/24/97, p. 324) and effectively concentrate in their hive the substances they come in contact with, what impact might that have on the honey they produce?

Thomas A. Carcaterra
Kensington, Md.

Honey can be affected by environmental contamination, but according to researcher Garon Smith, eating honey is safe. The kinds of substances that can get into honey are water-soluble, thus they don't pose as much of a problem as fat-soluble ones, which can accumulate in the body. Eating a lot of beeswax from a hive in a contaminated area would not be advisable, he adds.

—C. Wu

This trick's a treat

"Impurities give crystals that special glow" (SN: 5/17/97, p. 303) gave a nice description of triboluminescence. Here at Caltech we have

our own example. On Halloween, students drop pumpkins from nine stories high. These pumpkins have been frozen in liquid nitrogen. Typically, 1 in 10 pumpkins will emit a blue triboluminescent flash when it shatters.

Some students consider it a rite of passage to observe such a flash.

Wesley Boudville
Pasadena, Calif.

El Niño preparedness

While reading your article "Pacific Warmth Augurs Weird Weather" (SN: 5/24/97, p. 316), I was reminded of a National Geographic special I saw that showed the flooding and the economic depression caused by an El Niño.

Is anything being done to prepare for this upcoming El Niño?

David A. Perryman
Carmel, Calif.

Scientists and government officials are beginning to establish lines of communication for getting climate predictions into the hands of

farmers, fishers, relief workers, and other people who need them. This April, Columbia University and the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, Calif., announced that they are creating the International Research Institute to distribute such predictions to a global network of agencies and policy makers.

—R. Monastersky

Satellites safe from snowballs?

If Earth is indeed being "bombarded every day by thousands of house-size snowballs," why aren't our communications satellites and other space vehicles dropping like flies ("Is Earth Pelted by Space Snowballs?" SN: 5/31/97, p. 332)?

Jay Schuffman
Laurel, Md.

According to Frank, the objects would only affect those few spacecraft in very high orbits, such as the geostationary weather satellites. The snowballs vaporize before reaching the altitudes of most satellites. —R. Monastersky