

This Week

- 404 Image of a Planet: Too Hot to be True?
Ron Cowen
- 404 Cows' milk, diabetes connection bolstered
Nathan Seppa
- 405 Lead and bad diet give a kick in the teeth
Siri Carpenter
- 406 Tin replaces lead in automobile steel
Corinna Wu
- 406 Testosterone keeps male brain in shape
John Travis
- 407 Warmer climate spurred ancient plant pests
Richard Monastersky
- 407 Nocturnal spider favors artificial lights
Susan Milius

Articles

- 408 Old Glory, New Glory
The Star-Spangled Banner gets
some tender loving care
Corinna Wu

Departments

- 402 Books
- 403 Letters
- 410 Semi-Annual Index



Cover: The Star-Spangled Banner, the very flag that inspired the U.S. national anthem, is being treated in a 3-year, \$18 million preservation project at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. **Page 408**
(Photo: D.E. Hurlbert, Smithsonian Institution)

Visit **SCIENCE NEWS ONLINE** for special features, columns, and references.

<http://www.sciencenews.org>

Letters

It's a gas in the grass

It would seem that the source of the grass for the study described in "Gas emissions from mowed grass" (SN: 4/3/99, p. 223) might be important. Chemicals used in treating the grass would also be contained in the trimmings and could affect the emissions.

*Frank Deits
Ridgecrest, Calif.*

The article would indicate that any aerobically decomposing vegetation would be harmful to the environment. Are we organic gardeners now to conclude that our composting is polluting the atmosphere?

*Richard Hill
Tucson, Ariz.*

In our work, we studied a wide variety of plants: clover, alfalfa, and corn grown under controlled conditions in a research greenhouse and grass and cottonweed from outside our laboratory. All of them showed the same response to plant damage. It is not like-

ly that any chemical taken up by the plant during growth plays a role in this process.

Drying cut grass is different from composting. The volatile organic compounds our paper describes are released by the plant itself, as a defense against the damage caused by the cutting and drying. During composting, bacteria decompose the plant material, and gases like methane are released.

*Joost de Gouw
Utrecht University
Utrecht, The Netherlands*

It's too easy seeking green

The article "Parasites make frogs grow extra legs" (SN: 5/1/99, p. 277) reports on some outstanding work by Pieter Johnson and his colleagues. However, the article states that "[this] parasite work [will not] dampen interest in UV and pollutant research at the Environmental Protection Agency's Duluth, Minn., office." I find it distressing, albeit somewhat amusing, that at a time of poor support for the basic sciences EPA would even consider investing in studies to look for a link between environmental UV exposure and gross defor-

mity. Pollutants, of course. But UV? Unless amphibians in Minnesota deposit their eggs on the surface of the water (they don't), UV-A and UV-B would have little or no impact on embryonic development. Further, ponds at that latitude haven't seen enough UV-C since Pangaea to give cause for consideration. Distribution of our scarce research dollars with no regard for the purpose of the studies or their possible conclusions and applications is unconscionable.

*John M. Nelson
Richland, Wash.*

Digital fluency fallacy

In "Developing digital fluency" (SN: 5/8/99, p. 303), a National Research Council panel suggests that entire college curricula be modified to ensure that every graduate becomes a computer guru. This makes about as much sense as determining that all college graduates should be their own attorneys, physicians, accountants, or plumbers.

*Barlow Soper
Louisiana Tech University
Ruston, La.*