



RARE SEA OTTER DISPLAY—*This habitat grouping of the rare sea fur animal, on display at the Chicago Natural History Museum and worth \$7,500, is the first of its kind anywhere in the world.*

GENERAL SCIENCE

Standards Director Fired

Question of political influence in scientific bureaus raised by removal of Dr. A. V. Astin as director of the National Bureau of Standards over battery additive report.

► THE FORCED resignation of Dr. A. V. Astin as director of the National Bureau of Standards raises the whole question of whether there shall be political control over the findings of this and other scientific organizations in the government.

Displeasure with a report upon an additive to storage batteries precipitated the dismissal of Dr. Astin by Secretary of Commerce Sinclair Weeks and Assistant Secretary Craig R. Sheaffer. Dr. Astin rose through the scientific ranks of the bureau after the completion of his graduate fellowship in 1930.

No Bureau of Standards director through its long history has been fired through political decision heretofore. When Dr. Astin was senior associate director of the Bureau of Standards under Dr. Condon, preceding director, he was safe from precipitate demand for his resignation. So now are the other scientific personnel, including the present ranking associate director, Dr. Wallace R. Brode, who are under Civil Service.

Bureau of Standards scientists, concerned with testing and evaluating for the government literally thousands of products and methods offered to the government, obvi-

ously cannot function if a report displeasing to someone would result in loss of jobs. Most scientists would not work under such conditions and those who would could hardly render reliable reports.

This is more important than the question of whether battery additive tests by the Bureau of Standards or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology can be reconciled or are in disagreement.

President Eisenhower has been asked by Dr. E. U. Condon, former director, to make a complete and independent investigation of the facts.

Telegraphing the President from Corning, N. Y., where he is research director of the Corning Glass Works, Dr. Condon as president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, declared:

"Dr. Astin is an outstanding scientist and public servant of highest integrity and with a brilliant war record on proximity fuse development. He is standing for honesty and is unwilling to suppress technical facts."

Dr. Condon suggested further that the National Academy of Sciences, chartered by President Lincoln for independent scientific advisory service to the federal government, and the visiting committee of the National

Bureau of Standards, established by Congress to watch over Bureau of Standards work, are both suitable bodies of high standing which could investigate for President Eisenhower the issues at stake.

These issues, Dr. Condon declared, "if not handled well will deal a crippling blow to the scientific service of the government."

The visiting committee of the Bureau of Standards was not consulted in the Astin dismissal. Its chairman, Dr. Robert F. Mehl, metallurgist of the Carnegie Institute of Technology, knew nothing about it until he read about it in the newspapers.

Recent literature on additives to storage batteries is extensive. SCIENCE NEWS LETTER carried a story on battery additives in the issue of April 21, 1951, p. 255, based on findings published as National Bureau of Standards Circular 504, Battery Additives. At one time this pamphlet was available from the government printing office for 15 cents.

This story read as follows in part:

"Various preparations advertised to put new life into worn-out or so-called 'dead' lead-acid batteries, such as used in automobiles, have little or no value, it is shown from recent tests made by the National Bureau of Standards.

"The Bureau has made extensive laboratory and field tests for the Federal Government in order to determine the practicability of these so-called additives. The tests show little or no difference between batteries treated with these mixtures and similar untreated batteries used as controls."

Secretary of Commerce Weeks stated on March 31 that he was "going to direct the withdrawal of Circular 504 and all other circulars and technical reports dealing with battery additives until such times as those (new) tests are completed." The Government Printing Office reports that the Circular was ordered withdrawn from stock on March 26.

Science News Letter, April 11, 1953

PUBLIC SAFETY

Water in Coal Mines Threatens Three Counties

► THE ECONOMIC future of three Pennsylvania counties that produce anthracite coal now is "seriously threatened" by dammed up water in abandoned mines.

The U. S. Bureau of Mines reports that blocks of coal are left intact between abandoned and producing mines. The blocks act as barriers. They keep water that collects in abandoned mines from flooding active mines unexpectedly.

But a Bureau study of Pennsylvania's anthracite region turned up the fact that many of these barriers are in "doubtful condition." They may give way at any moment, possibly causing miners in adjacent mines to drown.

The threatened counties listed by the Bureau were Schuylkill, Columbia and Northumberland.

Science News Letter, April 11, 1953