

GENERAL SCIENCE

FDA Work Threatened

Worst threat in 30 years faces Food and Drug Administration officials in their efforts to stop contamination of wheat for baked products. Settlement of affair is at Cabinet level.

► UNDER THE new administration the scientific government agency that protects us from dirty, adulterated food and dangerous drugs and cosmetics, is facing the worst threat to its work in 30 years.

The threat comes through efforts to stop the Food and Drug Administration from setting and enforcing standards of cleanliness for wheat so that our bread and cakes will not have insects and rodent filth in them.

The principles involved go through all the work of the FDA.

Back in 1949, FDA started an educational campaign, trying to get farmers and grain elevator operators to handle wheat like food instead of "like crushed rock or sand." Bakers and millers had already done their end of the clean-up job but bits of ground-up insects and rodent hairs were still appearing in bread that was baked in clean bakeries from flour milled in clean mills. The insect and rodent bits could only be detected under the microscope, but FDA did not think Americans wanted to eat that kind of bread.

After more than three years of the educational campaign, FDA started, last September, to seize and condemn carloads of wheat if as much as one pellet of rodent excreta was found in a pint of wheat scattered through the car. That amount means the whole carload has been liberally doused with rodent excreta. And no milling machine made will take it out as the wheat is ground into flour. It must be kept out of the wheat before it reaches the mill.

FDA also wanted to condemn wheat with "bugs" in it. If there were as many as 15 bugs in a handful of wheat, it was not fit for human consumption in FDA's opinion. The "bugs" are very small but they leave holes in the wheat kernels which can be seen. All the farmer, or grain elevator operator, needs to do is pick up a handful of wheat kernels. If he finds holes in three kernels, he can be sure there are 15 insect-infested kernels in every handful.

But FDA has been forced to abandon part of this program to insure clean wheat for our bread, spaghetti, cakes and the like.

Pressure came from the grain trade (not the millers—they want clean wheat because they can get more flour from it than from wheat badly hollowed out by insects) and from the Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation. The latter will have some two billion dollars worth of wheat this year and does not want to have part of it condemned as unfit for human consumption.

FDA refused to back down completely. It arranged an agreement with Agriculture whereby, for this year, wheat with two percent or more visible insect damage and 20 or more "bugs" per quart would be declared contraband. FDA hopes to keep the pressure on farmers and grain handlers at least a little and to move forward toward clean wheat in the future.

The affair is now at the Cabinet level for decision, following a letter from Secretary of Agriculture Benson to the new Secretary of the new Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Mrs. Oveta Culp Hobby. So far, Mrs. Hobby has shown no signs of weakening in her support of her FDA.

Science News Letter, May 2, 1953

RADIOLOGY

Liver Cancer Relief By Massive X-ray Doses

► PATIENTS WITH widespread cancer which has involved the liver can now be given relief of symptoms, sometimes for as long as seven months, by large doses of X-rays directly to the liver, four doctors reported to the American Radium Society meeting in St. Louis.

The doctors are Ralph Phillips, David A. Karnofsky, Leonard D. Hamilton and J. J. Nickson of Memorial Center for Cancer and Allied Diseases, New York.

Heretofore doctors have thought that cancers which had spread to the liver were "hopeless" because normal liver tissue was believed as sensitive to X-rays as cancer tissue. X-ray treatment, it was therefore believed, would destroy liver function.

But liver function tests, performed for the first time on patients who had X-ray treatment of the liver, showed that the normal liver tissue was not harmed and continued to function.

The X-ray doses used by the Memorial doctors ranged from 2,000 to 3,750 roentgens, delivered by one-million-volt radiation equipment. At even the highest X-ray dose, there was no sign of damage to normal liver tissue.

The treatment was given to 36 patients with cancer of the breast, lung, esophagus, stomach, colon or rectum which had spread to the liver. Of the 36 patients, 28 were relieved of symptoms such as pain, abdominal distention, nausea and vomiting, weakness and fever, and loss of appetite. In some cases livers which were abnormally large before treatment were reduced in size.

Science News Letter, May 2, 1953

• RADIO

Saturday, May 9, 1953, 3:15-3:30 p.m. EDT
"Adventures in Science" with Watson Davis, director of Science Service, over the CBS Radio Network. Check your local CBS station.

Dr. John R. Dunning, dean of engineering at Columbia University, New York City, will discuss "National Science Fair" in progress at Oak Ridge, Tenn.

GENERAL SCIENCE

Literature Limitation Placed on Astin's Bureau

► NO CIRCULARS, bulletins or handbooks can be published by scientists at the National Bureau of Standards without an OK from the Commerce Department.

The order, now revealed for the first time, applies to National Bureau of Standards "Circulars, Handbooks, Applied Mathematics Series, Building Materials and Structures Reports, and Miscellaneous Publications."

These publications previously had a blanket approval, but that was withdrawn on Feb. 18 as a "purely routine" procedure, according to the director of the office of publications management in the Commerce Department, Donald R. Burgess.

One such circular, Number 504, covers Battery Additives. It has been withdrawn from circulation by order of Secretary of Commerce Weeks, who fired Dr. A. V. Astin as director of the National Bureau of Standards, stating that the bureau was not sufficiently "objective" in its analysis of the battery additive AD-X2.

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GENERAL SCIENCE

Defense Halts New Standards Research

► SECRETARY OF Defense Charles E. Wilson has ordered the military not to place any further contracts for scientific research at the National Bureau of Standards or other government agencies without clearance from him.

This action followed a request from Secretary of Commerce Sinclair Weeks, who noted that about 80% of the bureau's work is on defense projects. The order would seem to be part of a long-range program to take all possible research and development functions out of government's hands and put them into those of private industry.

Yearly budget of the Bureau of Standards from Congress is only about \$10,000,000. About \$40,000,000 comes from other government agencies, such as the Defense Department and the Atomic Energy Commission, for specific research projects.

The Defense Department shells out a major part of the \$40,000,000 for bureau work on such projects as proximity fuses, guided missiles and atomic energy.

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