

GENERAL SCIENCE

U.S. Cuts Book Role

Two Government agencies tighten up their distribution of do-it-yourself books. Depopularization of research findings affects flow of information to public.

By HOWARD SIMONS

► THE GOVERNMENT is getting out of the how-to-do-it book business. Informative and inexpensive Government-published books and pamphlets are being withdrawn from further publication or re-edited.

One such circular, "Care and Repair of the House," a Government Printing Office best-seller for 14 years, is being discarded. Although its sales are the healthiest in its history, the 60-cent how-to-do-it guide for homeowners will not be reprinted because the Department of Commerce, issuing agency, feels it is competitive with privately published books.

Now, with only a few hundred copies left in Government stock, the public will have to get it from McGraw-Hill, New York publishers, who are readying a revised, lengthened and heavily illustrated edition of it. (See SNL April 21, p. 323.)

Because the do-it-yourself pastime is becoming more and more popular with the public, it is becoming less and less popular with the Government.

How-To-Do Tabu

Helpful hints, generalizations and suggestions by the men responsible for much of the work and many of the Government published how-to-do-it books are no longer permitted. Scientists at the National Bureau of Standards in Washington are being told unofficially that they must stick to the scientific line.

"Popularizing science is not a primary function of our department," Dr. Allen V. Astin, director of the Bureau, told SCIENCE SERVICE. "The Bureau is a service agency to the nation's scientists and engineers. We are trying to make sure that with the limited funds available, we concentrate our efforts on our primary purpose, standards activities."

"The only area in which we would generalize," he stated, "is strictly in weights and measures, which is so uniquely our responsibility."

This means that in the future, findings by the Bureau's researchers will be published as technical and scientific reports.

Already, a Government publication is being re-edited to conform with the tightening up program. Circular 506, entitled "Automobile Anti-freezes," has been allowed to run out of stock without being reprinted at the Government Printing Office while it gets a depopularization face lift.

The anti-freeze circular contains information such as when a car owner should put anti-freeze in his vehicle and when he

should take it out. These and other suggestions like them, now in the tabu class of do's and don'ts, are considered out of the Bureau's area of responsibility.

Although few other books will be pulled from the shelves and re-written to delete the popular information, Dr. Astin said that "essentially what will happen is that as they get out of date, they will not be re-issued."

He emphasized, however, that in the move to service scientists and engineers directly, rather than the public, "there will be no withholding of information."

If the home owner in the United States finds himself deprived of Government-published how-to-do-it books, his wife is faring no better.

Any hopes she now entertains to receive continuing up-to-the-minute information about household equipment and appliances or clothing and household textiles are being dashed by the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Now caught in a Congressional hassle, the Agricultural Research Service administrators had proposed to eliminate all research in these fields and redirect their efforts towards more concentrated information about food and nutrition.

On Feb. 25, Dr. Byron T. Shaw, administrator for the ARS, outlined the particulars of death for Government research into home economics.

Household Appliances

Dr. Shaw stated in a memorandum that "financial considerations make it impossible" for the Service to continue research in fields dealing with the care, selection and use of household appliances and textiles and clothing.

It has been learned, however, that pressures have been brought to bear on the ARS from both within the Department of Agriculture and from outside the Government to kill home economics studies, and step up research for foods and nutrition.

On April 26, Senator Paul Douglas (D-Ill.), in discussing the agricultural appropriation bill before the Senate, pointed up the possibility that curtailment of Government research would also mean a curtailment of Government popular publications about home economics.

Senator Douglas also said that he understood "that this curtailment largely grew out of an attack which General Eisenhower made during his campaign against a bulletin which the Department of Agriculture issued on the subject of how to wash dishes."

• RADIO

Saturday, June 4, 1955, 5:00-5:15 p.m., EDT
"Adventures in Science" with Watson Davis, director of Science Service, over the CBS Radio Network. Check your local CBS station.

Prof. A. Wiley Sherwood, wind tunnel manager, University of Maryland, and Mr. Paul Jung, chief experimental engineer at Trailmobile, Inc., will discuss "Streamlining Truck-trailers."

In December, 1953, two bulletins, "Home Freezers, Their Selection and Use," and "Washing Machines, Their Selection and Use," were ready for printing, and then withheld. No explanation was given, but political implications have been hinted. Both publications are now being readied for the printer and were "approved" for publication in April.

Dr. Shaw told SCIENCE SERVICE that all home economics publications are being brought up to date and will continue to be printed as long as they remain in demand and "up-to-date."

However, the public can expect no new information from new studies, simply because there will be no new studies, unless the Congress decides to change the situation.

Administration Policy

There can be little doubt that the Government has learned how-to-do-it when it comes to eliminating its own how-to-do-it books published for the public.

It is clear that the Government is slowly but deliberately pulling itself out of the middle-man role between scientific research and the public, leaving home owners and homemakers no choice but to get the information from private sources at higher prices.

Fortunately, the what-to-do books, published by the Health, Education and Welfare Department for mothers, including the Government Printing Office's best-seller, "Infant Care," have not been affected.

The Department of Interior, on the other hand, manages to lock the barn doors before the horse escapes by having a tight editorial policy. All manuscripts prepared by Interior researchers are carefully considered in the light of competition with private information available on the topic. If the field is well covered by private sources, the manuscript is shelved. If there is a need for the information, it is published.

A good deal of the popular publication "dry-up" in store for the public is being caused by the administration's new policy of taking Government out of competition with private industry.

Science News Letter, May 28, 1955

Forty-one percent of the *pedestrians* killed in traffic accidents in 1953 were crossing between intersections.

The *mormon cricket* is not a cricket at all, but a relative of the common katydid and meadow grasshopper.