

GENERAL SCIENCE

Over-Population Threat

More public information concerning the dangers of overpopulation which threatens is needed together with information on other major social problems facing the nation.

➤ ONLY IF the American people understand the nature of over-population can this threat to the nation's survival be eliminated, Dr. Chauncey D. Leake, president-elect of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, has warned.

He urged the nation's scientists and leaders to take the people into their confidence on over-population and give the public knowledge on major social problems. Nine other major problems listed by Dr. Leake are:

1. Control of nuclear energy;
2. Water and air pollution;
3. Conservation of our natural resources and preservation of the inherent beauty of the earth;
4. Removal of the continuing threat of authoritarianism;
5. Preservation of the dignity of individual human beings;
6. Promotion of individual responsibility for self-sufficient old age;
7. Promotion of optimum physical and mental health;
8. Preservation of our comforts, conveniences and cleanliness, with equal opportunities for all in decent living; and
9. Understanding and controlling of our

individual and group prejudices, fears, anxieties and ambitions, so that we can enjoy the good life possible for us.

These problems, Dr. Leake said, are amenable to a scientific approach. He suggested that they be handled in this general way:

"Top priority should be given to more support, sympathy, appreciation, and better social recognition for basic scientific research. Basic science is concerned with getting verifiable information about ourselves and our environment.

"It is essential then to analyze and interpret this scientific knowledge freely for the benefit of the peoples of the world. This is a major scientific problem confronting us, dealing with the essentials of information theory, and of effective communication. We have to translate what science is about and what it is doing to our people in the language that they can understand."

Dr. Leake spoke at a luncheon marking the publication of "Perspectives in Virology," sponsored by the Institute of Microbiology, Rutgers University, under a grant by the Hartz Mountain Products Corporation, New York.

Science News Letter, March 28, 1959

PUBLIC HEALTH

Ancestors Felt "Fallout"

➤ OUR ANCESTORS of 200 or more years ago probably bumped into as much radioactivity as we do today.

Scientists do not have definite proof, but they suspect former generations were exposed to radioactivity as much as people living in the atomic age, James Terrill, assistant chief, division of radiological health, U. S. Public Health Service, said.

Until fairly recently, sanitary conditions were such that people did not bathe, or even wash their hands frequently. Since radioactivity can be washed off the body, present day sanitary facilities would tend to reduce the amount of radioactivity on the body.

Likewise, the lack of facilities years ago probably means that although there were no atomic blasts and fallout, a person still carried radioactivity on his body in granules of dust, soot and accumulated dirt, Mr. Terrill pointed out.

Pre-atomic age radioactivity was caused by naturally occurring radioisotopes and cosmic radiation.

The radiological health expert spoke at a meeting at which Arthur S. Flemming, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare,

described the maximum permissible limits for lifetime exposure of the individual to specific radiation and radioactive materials, at the present time. (See p. 199.)

The strontium-90 level for permissible concentration is 80 micromicrocuries per liter of water or milk. A curie is the amount of radioactivity in one gram of radium. A micromicrocurie is one millionth of a millionth of a curie.

In other words, lump together all the foods an individual eats in his lifetime. If the average concentration for strontium-90 does not exceed 80 micromicrocuries for each 2.2 pounds of the food, the radioactivity for strontium-90 is within the now permissible level.

The degree of fluctuation in concentrations is demonstrated in the data for strontium-90 levels of milk in the St. Louis, Mo., area. There was an increase from 12.2 micromicrocuries in October, 1958, to 20.1 in November, 1958, which then dropped back to 15.6 in December.

The average for the year ended October, 1958, was 11.4 compared with 12.5 as the average of the year ended November, 1958.

Science News Letter, March 28, 1959

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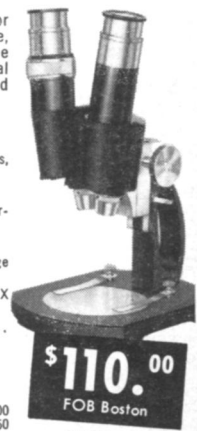
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