

## PUBLIC SAFETY

# Epileptics Drive Safely

► IT WOULD BE SAFER to drive with an epileptic than with an alcoholic on a holiday weekend.

This statement assumes, of course, that the person with epilepsy has the approval of his physician to drive because his seizures are controlled by proper drug dosage.

Seventeen states regulate the driving privileges of persons with specific chronic medical conditions, said Dr. Julian A. Waller of the California Department of Public Health in the *New England Journal of Medicine* 273:1406, 1965. These conditions include organic illnesses such as epilepsy, cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Psychosocial conditions include alcoholism, mental diseases and drug usage.

The present emphasis on epilepsy as the major illness handicap to safe driving is too narrow an approach, Dr. Waller pointed out.

The records of 2,672 persons with chronic medical conditions who were known to the

California Department of Motor Vehicles were compared with those of 922 drivers in that state who renewed their licenses but were not known to have medical conditions. Drivers with diabetes, epilepsy, cardiovascular disease, alcoholism and mental illness averaged twice as many accidents per one million miles of driving as those in the comparison group. Drivers over the age of 60 had more accidents if they also had medical conditions. A fairly low rate of accidents, but more violations, were found among drivers convicted for the illegal use of drugs.

Most persons with epilepsy showed improvement under treatment, Dr. Waller said, but most alcoholics showed no improvement or even progression of the condition.

Tolerance to drugs, combined with the excessive cost of illegal drugs, probably accounts for the lower rate of accidents among drug users than that of alcoholics. Also a drug addict seldom uses enough drugs at one time to achieve abnormal physiologic responses such as the alcoholic shows. Most people who take drugs probably do not feel like driving during the fairly brief euphoric state they are in after taking the drug.

The Epilepsy Foundation emphasizes the need for more uniformity in state laws governing the rights of persons with epilepsy. In a revised (1965) version of *The Legal Rights of Persons with Epilepsy*, the Foundation says that only in five states do the statutes set certain standards to be met before those with epilepsy can be licensed to drive cars.

• Science News Letter, 89:46 January 15, 1966

## TECHNOLOGY

## Atomic Bomb Test Holes To Be Plastic-Lined

► PLASTIC, used for everything from clothes to houses, may face its toughest role when it comes face to face with atomic weapons.

The Atomic Energy Commission plans to line a group of 4,000-foot-deep "nuclear test device emplacement holes" at its Nevada test site with reinforced plastic pipe, four feet in diameter.

The test holes are currently lined with steel, which costs the AEC about half a million dollars per hole. Among the new and, the AEC hopes, cheaper materials being considered are plastic, concrete and a combination of both.

Underground nuclear tests, the only kind allowed under the 1963 treaty with the Soviet Union, are not necessarily small ones. The United States set off its largest test of 1965 on Dec. 3 which, though only referred to as an "intermediate" blast, may have been as big as a one megaton bomb.

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## Nature Note

### Joint-Legged Animals

Many small creatures walk around on legs covered with a tough jointed material, much as the knights of old used to walk around in their jointed armor. These jointed animals include lobsters, scorpions and insects. Actually they have jointed bodies, jointed antennae and sometimes jointed tails or stingers.

They are grouped together in a phylum called Arthropoda, which comes from "arthro" meaning jointed and "poda" meaning feet.

The arthropods are the largest group of invertebrates, as animals without backbones are called.

Arthropods have no internal skeleton, but have a tough exoskeleton made of chitin that covers all parts of the animal. Since this covering is so hard and inflexible, a softer thinner material joins the sections over the animals' joints and permits them to bend.

The hard cuticle is often molted or shed at intervals, allowing the animal to grow by a succession of steps during the few hours while the body wall is flexible.

With nearly a million known species, this phylum is the largest in the animal kingdom. Insects make up the bulk of the group, with about 900,000 species creeping and crawling all over the world.

No other phylum is so widely distributed. The animals can be found on both North and South Poles, in the deep abysses of the ocean as well as on the high mountain peaks. They thrive in icy glaciers and also in boiling hot springs. Some enjoy the driest deserts and highly salty lakes, while others live in a wet moss, constantly sprinkled by waterfalls.

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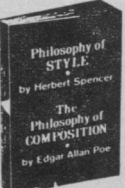
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