

Letters

Uranium Enrichment

It is stated in William D. Metz's Research News article on laser enrichment of uranium (16 Aug., p. 602) that scientists working in this area at Los Alamos are rumored to be ahead of scientists at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory but are keeping their progress secret. The rumor that we are responsible for the classification of this project is emphatically false.

The classification was initiated in 1972, early in the history of the project, by the members of the Atomic Energy Commission in Washington and has recently been upheld. We who work in this area at Los Alamos are thus not allowed to make public disclosures of our work.

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Clean Air by 1975?

The revisions of the Energy Supply and Environmental Coordination Act of 1974, as described by Constance Holden (News and Comment, 21 June, p. 1269) sound extremely rational in the face of the apparent inevitable setback of clean air goals that has resulted from insufficient foresight, insufficient determination by both government and industry, and the cussedness of things in general. However, the end result will be catastrophic.

As nearly as I can tell, industry compliance dates have been advanced into the future, while nothing has been done with the target dates for achieving the national primary air quality standards. These still remain in the 1975-1977 biennium. Accordingly, local agencies, such as that of the state of Colorado, are forced to achieve ambient air quality goals during a time when air pollution is being allowed to continue unabated or to increase.

The impossibility of achieving clean air goals is not envisioned under the

due process of the law. As a result, local authority is progressively usurped by federal authority, which cannot solve the problem either, but is apparently legally entitled to fail. In addition, major emergency regulations are being forced upon the citizens that will be dropped in only 1 or 2 years, as source intensity finally begins to drop. The result will be a progressive loss of credibility by the local agencies, by the Environmental Protection Agency, and finally by the entire environmental movement.

Had the Clean Air Act of 1970 been taken seriously from its inception, the present crunch would not have occurred. Since industry in general appears not to have taken it seriously until about a year ago, compliance with the 1975-1977 dates has become impossible, and the situation is certainly exacerbated by the national energy problem. If Congress in its wisdom opts to extend further the compliance time of industry, then it must extend as well the compliance times for the achievement of clean air standards in the polluted cities. To do otherwise is to invite chaos.

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Sex Preselection

In their article discussing the implications of sex preselection in the United States (10 May, p. 633), Westoff and Rindfuss assume that such techniques will be "effective, acceptable, and routinely used by women with a preference. . . ." This assumption is critical to understanding and forecasting the social impact of sex predetermination techniques. Yet, the authors give us no particular reason for accepting this assumption and, in fact, they themselves present contrary evidence, writing that "The current attitudes of married women suggest that a substantial proportion would be unfavorably disposed toward being able to choose the

sex of their children . . . the possibility that such techniques would be infrequently used cannot be dismissed." Furthermore, the availability of a specific technique might also influence attitudes. There may be good reason to assume a different response to a choice between artificial insemination and a prophylactic chemical taken orally or by injection. Of importance here are the results of a study (1) (also cited by the authors) which found that many of those interviewed who initially supported the use of sex predetermination "did not like the idea of using artificial insemination techniques to choose the sex of their future children, however. Fully 50% defected from their favorable opinion; 17% changed to 'no,' while 33% moved to a 'not sure' position."

What this suggests is that in order to understand more fully the relationship between parental sex preferences, sex predetermination techniques, and the subsequent social impact, future survey research must obtain information relating to the expressed willingness of women (couples) to use a particular technique and the conditions under which such use is facilitated or impeded.

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References

1. G. E. Markle and C. B. Nam, *Soc. Biol.* **18**, 81 (1971).

Airships

Vaeth's suggestion (Letters, 3 May, p. 524) that we resurrect one of our colossal failures is surprising. Three dirigibles that were built by the U.S. Navy—the *Shenandoah*, the *Akron*, and the *Macon*—all broke up in what the Weather Service would now call mild turbulence. This 100 percent failure rate was somewhat embarrassing to the Navy and created numerous "investigations." It also demonstrated that, for the rigid-frame airship to be safe, the airframe would have to be as structurally sound as that of the conventional aircraft.

As a consequence, the Navy thereafter used only nonrigid airships, or blimps, which are not so susceptible to the occasional wrath of the sky. They