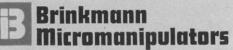
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LETTERS

Metrically Speaking

In their editorial of 16 January (p. 141), Mina Rees and Arthur H. Livermore conclude that scientists can help promote the use of the metric system by "scrupulously using the metric system themselves." A more appropriate title for their editorial might have been: "Kilometerstone legislation for a metric United States."

JAMES S. KANE

Energy Research and Development Administration, 20 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20545

How paradoxical of Rees and Livermore to use the word "Milestone" in the title of their otherwise timely and informative editorial regarding the signing of the Metric Conversion Act of 1975. Surely "kilometerstone" would have been more appropriate, but since stone (plural) is equivalent to 14 pounds avoirdupois in Great Britain, perhaps "metric rock" would have the best choice.

> W. A. Nelson-Rees Robert B. Owens

Cell Culture Laboratory, School of Public Health, Naval Biosciences Laboratory, University of California, Oakland 94625

We used milestone intentionally in our editorial to suggest subtly (too subtly?) that (i) the Metric Conversion Act of 1975 is a significant step in the direction of a change in our system of measurement and that (ii) we do not at the same time have to purge our language of all nonmetric referents. We expect that "milestone" will remain an English idiom long after "mile" as a unit of measurement has become archaic.

The suggestion by Nelson-Rees and Owens that "metric rock" be substituted for "milestone" leads us to propose that we should "metrify but not petrify." Can we look forward to "metric rock" as a new genre of modern music?

We are pleased at the response to our editorial. Others besides Kane, Nelson-Rees and Owens wrote and took us to task for "milestone." We hope that they and other scientists will heed the suggestions in the last paragraph of the editorial for ways in which scientists and science educators can help smooth the transition of the United States to the metric system.

ARTHUR H. LIVERMORE AAAS Office of Science Education, 1776 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20005

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