LETTERS

Cover Caption: April Fools'?

I stared for some time at .your 31 March (1 April minus 1?) cover trying to perceive the blue catecholamine varicosities contacting the orange neurophysin-containing neurons. After a while I concluded that you had really published the tracks of a pair of yetis crossing a snow-covered lava flow, but were embarrassed to admit it. It was with a sense of disappointment that I turned to page 1461 and discovered that the tracks were those of a doped-up rat with inky feet. Pity.

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The *Science* cover of 31 March has black marks in patterns resembling the tracks of a plantigrade animal. On the other hand, the cover explanation (on page 1389) mentions blue varicosities and an orange neuron and ascribes the picture to McNeill and Slakek, referring the reader to page 1461. Since the only orange I could detect was in the orange-red *Science* title, and since there was no blue that I could see, I was afraid my eyes were deteriorating rapidly. Fortunately, page 1461 has illustrations of patterns like those on the cover, and these are labeled "hind footprints."

I am still worrying about McNeill and Slakek. Are they trapped on some sort of a Möbius strip with those blue varicosities and that orange neuron? Schallert *et al.*, who wrote the report on page 1461, do not mention these poor souls and their colorful companions.

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See the erratum on page 286 of the 21 April issue.—EDITOR

Committee on National Statistics

I write to elaborate on Constance Holden's brief reference to the Committee on National Statistics in her article "ABASS [Assembly for Behavioral and Social Sciences]: Social sciences carving a niche at the Academy" (News and Comment, 17 Mar., p. 1183).

First, the Committee's purposes are far broader than looking at "which numbers to count," although even that is a far from simple matter. What to count? What to measure? How to count and measure? How to analyze the resulting counts and measures? How to make the numbers and analyses clear and available to heterogeneous audiences? Those are just some of the general rubrics for the Committee's activities.

Second, the Committee is by no means confined to statistical questions related to social policies—unless you define "social policy" so broadly as to include all matters of public policy. The Committee's charter is to study statistical issues arising anywhere in the public policy domain, whether the context be social, physical, biological, or whatever. The Committee has already published the studies *Setting Statistical Priorities*, *Surveying Crime*, and (jointly with other units in the Academy) *Environmental Monitoring*. It expects shortly to publish a report of an experiment in survey techniques under the provisional title *Privacy and Confidentiality as Factors in Survey Response*. It is currently working on such diverse topics as statistics on productivity, the effect of changes in the atmospheric ozone on the incidence of skin cancer, and procedures for dealing with undercount in population censuses.

The Committee has thus been busy carrying out the activities projected in my 1973 *Science* article (*1*), written soon after the Committee was formed.

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References

1. W. Kruskal, *Science* **180**, 1256 (1973).

Benzene: Consumer and Occupational Exposure

I was greatly interested in the letter "Benzene in consumer products" from R. J. Young *et al.* (28 Jan, p. 248) both for the technical information contained and for the insight provided into the approach to such problems that is now common in many regulatory agencies. The letter mentions in the same breath the proposal for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to lower *occupational* exposure limits to average concentrations in air of 1 part per million and a petition to remove all benzene products from the market. The implication of the letter appears to be that the high atmospheric benzene concentrations observed in a simulated domestic consumer exposure, well above the pro-

posed occupational exposure level, lasting 30 minutes, may justify severe restriction or elimination of all benzene-containing products from the consumer market.

While I hold absolutely no brief for benzene products, it seems rash to push for such a step on the evidence provided. To start with, it would have to be shown that *occasional* consumer exposure to high concentrations would lead to health effects comparable to those from *continuous* exposure to lower concentrations over a 40-hour working week that might result in an equivalent cumulative intake. Such effects of acute exposure would depend on normal elimination rates, and one would clearly need to distinguish between regulating commercial operations and occasional short-term uses by the general public. In addition, one would have to show that replacement compounds, for example, for paint strippers, would themselves not result in equally bad or worse effects than the banned materials.

None of these remarks should be construed as arguing against the desirability of reducing unnecessary exposures to benzene or of exploring possibly less harmful alternatives. However, we have seen too many other cases where the public has been misled by discussions of supposed health hazards when high-level short-term exposures were extended, with little or no qualification, to cases of long-term, continuous exposures, be it to chemicals, food additives, or radiation.

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Energy Costs: Nuclear Versus Oil

President Carter quoted some interesting figures at the opening of the international Nuclear Fuel Cycle Evaluation (INFCE) meeting about the capital requirements of various energy resources, per "barrel of oil per day [bpd], or its equivalent derived at the ultimate site of use." The figures were: zero to $3500 for conservation, $10,000 for North Sea oil, $20,000 for Alaskan oil, and $200,000 to $300,000 for nuclear power. The President concluded that "there is a tremendous cost" for the use of nuclear power.

This argument derives directly from Amory Lovins' recent writings (*1*). Aside from the inappropriateness of judging the cost of an energy source by its capital requirements alone, the num-