

committee of Missouri citizens advised the DOE Kansas City office that the concept had been unfairly overlooked.

Proxmire derided the project as an "outhouse elevated to a seat level of approximately five feet above the ground." The necessity for this unusual feature is simply that the composting process may profit from the advantage of sunlight. The inventor, H. Douglas Elley of Lupus, Missouri, a town of 50 souls, originally named his device "The Skycraper," a title which the Department of Energy persuaded him to abandon. DOE officials deny that the reason for the change was to avoid attracting the attention of Senator Proxmire and his Golden Fleece award.

Scientists Favorable Toward Extrasensory Perception

Margaret Mead got the parapsychologists into the AAAS; physicist John Wheeler of the University of Texas wants to excommunicate them. While public debate continues, private belief in ESP among scientists seems constant at a surprisingly high level.

As many as 9 percent of natural scientists at American colleges consider that ESP "is an established fact" while another 45 percent believe it is "a likely possibility," according to a survey published in the *Zetetic Scholar*. This predominantly favorable attitude toward ESP is mirrored by the academic community as a whole, 16 percent of whom think ESP is an established fact and 50 percent that it is a likely possibility. Natural scientists were slightly more skeptical than average, and social scientists more doubtful still.

The survey, conducted by Mahlon Wagner and Mary Monnet, is based on questionnaires filled out in 1973. Wagner, a psychologist at the State University of New York in Oswego, says that he does not think attitudes have changed since then. He suspects that social scientists are more skeptical about ESP than natural scientists because of their familiarity with the way that experimenters can unconsciously influence the results of their experiments.

The questionnaire was sent to 2100

academics, with a return rate of 49 percent. Previous studies, including a Gallup poll of June 1978, have shown that a university education does not lead to a decline in belief in the paranormal. "It would certainly seem that college professors, as a group, have attitudes toward ESP that are much more positive than those of the American people as a whole," Wagner and Monnet conclude.

A Dearth of Phosphate?

The General Accounting Office, Congress's watchdog over the executive branch, has a bone to pick with the Office of Science and Technology Policy.

The GAO takes exception to the office's "negative attitude and abdication of responsibility."

The problem is that the GAO is concerned about future supplies of phosphate and the OSTP, by and large, is not.

The nation's richest reserves of phosphates are in the Bone Valley formation of Florida. They account for 75 percent of present production and are about to be depleted.

The GAO would like the government to make a precise estimate of phosphate reserves at home and abroad so that sensible plans can be made to ensure future supplies.

The Bureau of Mines is responsible for this chore, but its estimates are somewhat erratic. In 1972 it reckoned world phosphate reserves at 104 billion metric tons. In 1974 the estimate was revised to 5 billion tons. The in figure for 1979 is 27 billion.

Estimates of national phosphate reserves are not that much more reliable. The Export-Import Bank, in approving a \$400 million deal for exporting phosphates to the Soviet Union, cited corporate data putting American phosphate reserves at 16 billion short tons, whereas the then current Bureau of Mines figures was 3.8 billion short tons.

The Export-Import Bank wrote to the GAO asking for that observation to be dropped from its report.

Phosphates do not seem to be in particularly short supply. There is enough for at least the next 20 years. But 20 years is not that long, and phosphates as fertilizers make an im-

portant difference to crop yields. The GAO would like the Secretary of Interior to conduct a careful survey of American and world phosphate reserves as a basis for future planning.

The Office of Science and Technology Policy disagrees on the grounds that a cabinet level committee is reviewing the situation on phosphates and 11 other mineral industries.

But the GAO has already reviewed the committee's work and finds it pays no serious attention to the phosphate problem.

GAO urges the OSTP to desist from its negative attitude and assume responsibility for formulating a comprehensive national R & D policy for phosphates.

When the German chemist Justus von Liebig discovered in 1800 that phosphates derived from bone made excellent fertilizer, the demand for bones was so great that there was a rush to mine the more sanguinary of Europe's many battlefields. Policymakers in Washington, if they can bury their differences, may come up with a phosphates policy that looks beyond the ossuary.

Agent Orange Again

Agent Orange just won't go away. The herbicide sprayed over South Vietnam from 1962 to 1970 contained a mere 368 pounds of dioxin, yet a decade later the issue of possible health effects from the dioxin contaminant is still unresolved.

A preliminary finding announced (this month reported for the first time the presence of dioxin residues in the fat tissues of Vietnam veterans. Lyndon E. Lee, of the Veterans Administration in Washington, found traces ranging from 3 to 57 parts per trillion in samples from 10 out of 22 individuals. The significance of the findings is not yet clear.

Complaints of herbicide-related illnesses began to reach the Veterans Administration in late 1977. By September 30 of this year, some 4800 people had requested treatment and 750 had submitted compensation claims. The VA has allowed no claims based solely on exposure to herbicides in Vietnam because the role of dioxin has not yet been determined.

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