

Briefings

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Britannica in the Doghouse

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* may be more careful in selecting its contributors in the future following a furor it has stirred up over its entry on "dogs" in the 1991 edition.

One section of the 7-page article states that among the roles filled by dogs is "test subject for the vivisection laboratory." Later on, the entry relates that the use of dogs, especially beagles, in biomedical research, "which often entails much suffering, has been questioned for its scientific validity and medical relevance to human health problems. For example, beagles and other animals have been forced to inhale tobacco smoke for days and have been used to test household chemicals such as bleach and drain cleaner. In addition, dogs have been used to test the effects of various military weapons and radiation."

And the author chosen as an expert in canines by the encyclopedia? None other than Michael W. Fox, veterinarian at the Humane Society of the United States and prominent critic of the use of animals in research.

The entry has raised a ruckus in the pharmaceutical and biomedical communities. It began last August when Tony Mazzaschi, public affairs officer for the American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics (ASPET), came across a reference to the encyclopedia entry—in which its antivivisectionist tone was approvingly mentioned—in an obscure newsletter. After verifying that the company stood behind the wording, ASPET chief Frank Standaert notified ASPET's membership, urging them to check out the encyclopedia before they buy it or recommend its use. The Foundation for Biomedical Research also swung into action, alerting its members and several dozen

research groups. The newsletter of the Federation of Societies for Experimental Biology has devoted a full page in its December newsletter to the issue. Barbara Rich of the Foundation for Biomedical Research points out that the information in the offensive section is mostly out of date—beagles, for example, have not been used for defense research in two decades—and that the article contains no mention of benefits from dog research.

According to a 14 November letter Standaert received from a *Britannica* spokesman, the company is thinking the matter over. "We always attempt to secure competent and well-respected authorities in their respective field[s]....The question you raise is being investigated carefully, and your comments, as well as those of other correspondents who may feel otherwise, will be seriously considered when the article...is...updated."

Mazzaschi, by the way, says he looked up "cats"—and found it free of animal rights rhetoric.

Beryllium Disease

After two workers at the nuclear weapons plant at Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee were diagnosed earlier this year with chronic beryllium disease (CBD), a rare and sometimes fatal scarring of the lungs, the Department of Energy ordered up a 4-year probe. Now, part of that probe has begun—tests conducted by the Oak Ridge Associated Universities' Center for Epidemiological Research measuring "beryllium sensitivity" in 3000 people who've been exposed to the metal's dust since Manhattan Project managers opened the Y-12 plant at Oak Ridge in 1943. Buck Jones, the plant's medical director, calls the study the most comprehensive of its kind.

Currently, 119 Y-12 employees process beryllium, which has a number of industrial uses, including rocket heat shields and nuclear weapon and electrical components. Jones says the disease often takes 20 to 25 years to develop, and adds

that the stricken employees haven't worked with the stuff for years. There is no cure for CBD, estimated to strike 2% of people exposed to the metal. Anti-inflammatory steroids alleviate such symptoms as a dry cough, weight loss, and fatigue. Like other lung-fibrosis diseases that are linked to lung cancer, "some people suspect [CBD] might cause some lung cancer" too, Jones says.

While difficult to diagnose, about 900 cases of CBD have been reported since a Beryllium Case Registry was established in 1952. The Department of Energy (DOE) estimates that about 10,000 DOE employees and 800,000 people in private industry have worked with beryllium.

Radar Gun Hazards?

Radar guns—hand-held units used by the law to nail speeders—have been in use since the early '60s. Now they've been accused of causing cancer.

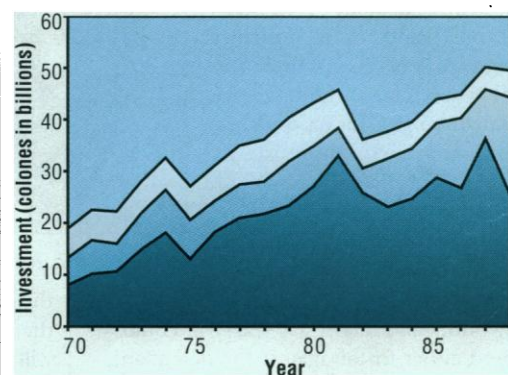
Police officers in several states

Accounting for the Environment

The "debt crisis" facing many developing countries is in reality more of an environmental crisis, one that is "triggered by faulty economic indicators that allow the destruction of natural resources to masquerade as economic growth," according to the World Resources Institute (WRI), a Washington, D.C., think tank.

Take the case of Costa Rica. A recent WRI analysis of that nation's economy, done in cooperation with the Tropical Science Center in San Jose, concludes that depreciation of the country's forests, soils, and fisheries has robbed it of almost 30% of its potential net growth over the past 20 years. "Every year... 5% of [Costa Rica's] Gross Domestic Product has vanished without a trace," said WRI economist Robert Repetto at a 12 November press conference held in Washington. In other words, accounting procedures have totally failed to reflect erosion of the natural resource base.

Indeed, a 1989 WRI analysis of Indonesia's national accounting system showed an annual growth rate of 4%—far less than the 7% shown from conventional calculations. "Governments today worship at the altar of national accounts," which are "tragically flawed," concluded WRI president Gus Speth at the briefing. Speth laid the blame at the door of the United Nations Statistical Commission, which supplies a national accounting framework followed worldwide. WRI labeled the system a "relic of the 1930s"—when no one was worrying about resource depletion—that "fosters the illusion that countries can prosper by destroying their natural resource base." That's why they can carry on for years with no indication of problems and then suddenly



Costa Rica. Dramatic reduction in net investment is seen when accounts are adjusted for natural resource depletion.

they go bankrupt, said Repetto—as happened in Costa Rica in the early '80s.

Perhaps a dozen countries around the world are currently attempting to revise their accounting procedures. Indeed, said Repetto, the only real resistance to reform is from statisticians, who he says are resistant to change and chronically underfunded. And the United States is a case in point: Although Congress has directed the Commerce Department to develop a revised system of national accounting, nothing has been done because of budgetary constraints.

From "Accounts Overdue: Natural Resource Depletion in Costa Rica," available for \$12.50 plus \$3 shipping from WRI Publications, P.O. Box 4852, Hampden Station, Baltimore, Md. 21211.

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