

A new perspective on chemicals

■ Why are federal health agencies pouring so much time and energy into regulating chemicals that pose less of a health hazard than peanut butter? That's the question being asked by Dr. Bruce Ames, a scientist in the biochemistry department at the University of California, Berkeley. Ames, creator of the Ames Test and one of the foremost consumer advocates of the 1960s, is again in the national spotlight since publishing *Ranking Possible Carcinogenic Hazards*, which challenges the government's method of assessing a chemical's potential risk.

According to Ames, researchers need to take into account how many people are likely to be exposed to a chemical and its threat at low doses, not merely what happens when you pump it into a rat. Case in point: Ames points out that the EPA banned EDB after determining it could cause three cases of cancer in 1,000 (about one percent of all cancer in the United States). "It would be more reasonable," writes Ames, "to compare the possible hazard of EDB residues to that of other common possible hazards. For example, the aflatoxin in the average peanut butter sandwich, or a raw mushroom, is 75 to 200 times, respectively, the possible hazard of EDB."

Ames adds that the alternatives to chemicals should be considered. That way, he says, regulators can set more realistic priorities for concern.

Arizona legalizes sterile carp

■ Golf course superintendents in Arizona have won the battle of the white amur. The fish, commonly known as a grass carp, had been used to control vegetation in course ponds and streams until the Arizona Game and Fish Department banned it last October. Citing its threat to the limited vegetation in the state's game rivers and fears that it would reproduce, the Department ordered the fish destroyed and created stiff penalties for those failing to comply.

A compromise was reached this summer when the state legislature approved the use of genetically altered variety of the fish, called a triploid, which is sterile.

"There has been no evidence that the triploid white amur has any environmental impact on the game fish population or waterfowl," said Dennis M. Wesseldine, a regional superintendent with the American Golf Corporation. "We must encourage all superintendents and golf organizations in the states where the amur is illegal to lobby with local state legislators to encourage the complete biological control of aquatic weeds."

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