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Letters

Natural sources of organochlorines

Immense quantities of organochlorines and other organohalogen chemicals occur naturally in our biosphere — nearly 2,000 different compounds at last count, 700 of which were discovered in the last 10 years alone — with new examples being isolated and identified regularly ("Organochlorines lace Inuit breast milk," SN: 2/12/94, p.111).

For example, nearly 100 different natural halogen compounds are present in one species of edible Hawaiian seaweed, and one species of Florida Gulf acorn worm produces 20 different organohalogen compounds. Some 5 million tons of natural methyl chloride are produced by the biomass annually, dwarfing the 26,000 tons of emissions produced by humans. Tetrachloroethylene, chloroform, carbon tetrachloride, methylene chloride, and several natural CFCs have been detected in the emissions of the Santiaguillo volcano of Guatemala and the Kamchatka volcanoes of Siberia. Previously unknown PCB isomers were discov-

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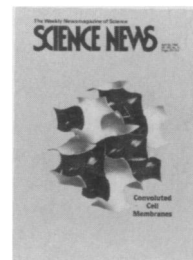
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Of Craters and Crevices

Cover: A biophysicist has taken another look at the structure of the cell membrane. This model shows one of his views of its three-dimensional shape. The different colors show the two sides of the membrane. (Photo: Simon Tong, SUNY at Buffalo)



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Science Service, which publishes SCIENCE NEWS, is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921. It gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of underrepresented groups. Through its Youth Programs it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the *Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students*.

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ered in Mount St. Helens volcanic ash.

Obviously, not all of these halogen sources add significantly to the total halogen content of the biosphere, but many do. In any event, chlorine is as natural to our world as carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen.

Gordon W. Gribble
Professor of Chemistry
Dartmouth College
Hanover, N.H.

Rock-a-bye safely

Last year, you ran an article detailing the benefits of babies sleeping in the same bed with their parents ("Co-sleeping gives babies a boost," SN: 12/4/93, p.380). Unfortunately, this is also a known cause of accidental infant mortality.

Babies can be suffocated by the overlying body of a sibling or parent. One of the many confirmations of this is a 10-year survey of autopsy findings attributing 16.7 percent of fatal unintentional injuries in infants to overlying: "In each case, the dead infant was discovered beneath another person" (AMERICAN JOURNAL

OF THE DISEASES OF CHILDREN, August 1992).

I fear the uninformed reader, on the basis of the research you described, might move an infant from a crib to the parent's own bed, increasing the possibility of a tragic outcome. The currently recommended location for a sleeping infant is alone, in a crib not shared by older children.

Douglas S. Nelson
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Salt Lake City, Utah

Praise for planning EMF research

Many of us are involved in a vast, unplanned experiment on the bioeffects of electromagnetic radiation ("Another way EMFs might harm tissues," SN: 2/19/94, p.127). I, for one, work at a data and communications center with a large radiotransmitting antenna in the parking lot.

I am glad that researchers like McConnell are conducting intelligently designed experiments to supplement the uncontrolled one.

Robert Kirkman III
South Miami, Fla.

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