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# The Daily Tar Heel

86th year of editorial freedom

## When graduation is around the corner, it's too late

In hopes of making a high-school diploma represent more than paper and ink, 37 states now have minimum-competency tests to determine who gets a diploma and who gets a "certificate of attendance."

The failing rate of those taking the tests is alarming. Last October, 36 percent of Florida's juniors flunked the math portion of the test and 8 percent came up short in reading and writing skills. Educators are predicting that 20 to 35 percent of all North Carolina juniors will fail upcoming competency tests required for high-school graduation.

There is no need to make excuses for the predicted failing rate in North Carolina or to point fingers at who is to blame. But there is a need to identify students who have inadequate reading or math skills and bring them up to par.

The N.C. Board of Education will request \$8.7 million from the General Assembly to institute remedial programs for students who fail the competency test. The request is a wise one and displays a commitment to finance whatever it takes to teach students the minimum knowledge demanded by the test.

But correcting the problem when graduation is around the corner is not enough. Remedial programs in reading and math at the grade-school level can do more to ensure at least a minimum achievement by every student.

The \$8.7 million request aimed at financing preparation for a second-round with the test may be justified, but the state should also support an overall remedial program like the one in New Jersey, which allocated \$57 million for programs to pinpoint and help slow learners in early grades, as well as to assist students who have already failed the competency test.

Expanded remedial programs deserve as much or more attention from the state's educators and legislators as Gov. Hunt's proposed science and math high school for gifted students has received. The high school for 500 to 1,000 bright students suggests a commitment to excellence, but funding of the project in lieu of stronger support for remedial programs sacrifices minimum achievement for the masses at the expense of attention to the few.

North Carolina has always displayed a concern for the education of its people: its university system is one of the best in the nation. Gov. Hunt has long recognized that the roots of education lie in the elementary schools, and has worked to develop a reading program and institute the minimum-competency tests. The state should continue to strive for excellence and support the governor's program for talented students, but should also devote more attention and monies to the plight of those who fail to thrive in a still-inadequate educational system. An endorsement of the proposed remedial program is a step in that direction. Establishment of a fuller program aimed at younger students might revolutionize education in North Carolina.

## A non-fiction 'Silent Spring'?

# Cancer inducing agents: problems with regulation

By PETER HAPKE

It all began with Rachel Carson's diatribe against DDT: *Silent Spring*. Since then, toxic substances have been increasingly examined by the federal government's microscopic eye. Today, that initial probe is becoming another "Vietnam conflict" as scientists, federal agencies, industry, and labor continually argue over how to decide whether a substance causes cancer in humans and what to do about it.

The most recent offensive attack is the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration's plan to reduce the time it takes the federal government to determine whether a toxic substance is a carcinogen (cancer-causing agent), and to find a mechanism for determining what constitutes a "safe level of exposure." To reduce testing time, many scientists advocate the use of bacteria tests such as the Ames Test, instead of time-consuming and expensive animal tests. Bacteria tests, though not as definitive as animal studies, are regarded as effective in screening substances to determine whether or not they are harmful enough to warrant closer examination. However, these new speedy test procedures are not expected to be used for another three or four years until the scope and accuracy of the method can be assessed.

Deciding what is a carcinogen has become another battlefield. Many scientists hold that almost any substance that can cause change in cell structure (mutagenesis) or that can cause tumors, even though harmless, are usually carcinogens and hence hazardous. In the late 1960s this governing principle — any chemical that is found to cause tumors in animals or living tissue should be characterized as a carcinogen and a hazard to man — paralleled the growing public concern for cancer hazards galvanized by Carson's seminal report on toxic substances in the environment. The World Health Organization views environmental toxic substances as one of the most pervasive health problems in the world; they argue that 60 to 90 percent of all cancers are caused by such substances. For this reason, some scientists dismiss a safe "threshold" exposure level for toxic substances as impossible to determine and maintain there should be a "zero" exposure level.

The corporate fusillade has sounded as well. There is great corporate concern about the economic impact of OSHA's plan. One signal of concern is the establishment of the American Industrial Health Council by 40 companies, many of them in the petrochemical industry which, incidentally, many scientists believe has spawned an increase in the number of carcinogens in common use. In an 85-page brief, the council recommended a scientific definition of carcinogens that is narrower than OSHA's definition. And, while conceding there has been an

increase in the incidence of cancer since 1900, the council asserts this increase can be attributed to increased cigarette smoking and greater life spans — more people are living to an age at which cancer is more likely to attack.

Another skirmish centers upon the social and economic questions involved in balancing the health risk of a possible carcinogen against the costs — sometimes hundreds of millions of dollars — of eliminating the hazards. For instance, labor leaders have attacked the prospect of sticking an economic price tag on a worker's life as "calculated murder;" however, many economists contend such calculations are essential when the federal government has some indications that 2,156 unregulated substances may cause cancer.

A measure of how heated the regulation issue has become is indicated by the recent discovery that the nation's largest commercial testing laboratory — Industrial Bio-test of Northbrook, Ill. — deliberately falsified data submitted to the government on potential carcinogens. Most shocking was the evidence that at least four major pesticide manufacturers were aware of the problem — they knew of the irregularities in the IBT test data and submitted applications for federal

approval for their products. One of the companies, Chevron Chemical, had falsified IBT lab records covering six months of a two-year animal study on the Chevron insecticide Orthene. The study was made

between 1970 and 1972; Chevron makes 8 million pounds of the insecticide annually.

As in all areas of government regulation, the regulators and those regulated will always be in conflict; toxic substances are no exception. Yet, inevitably, this issue, unlike many others, must be resolved by a social value judgment: What is the level of acceptable risk? Because the cancer latency period is 15 to 40 years, it is unacceptable to find out whether a suspected substance will produce cancer in man. Tumors also present a problem. Certain induced tumors transform into malignancies, but we can seldom predict which tumors will become malignant and which will not. Should we, then, ban all tumor-causing chemical agents? And, because it will be years before inexpensive and accurate cancer-testing procedures such as the Ames bacteria test can be used, should we regard every chemical that induces cancer in animals as a potential carcinogen in man?

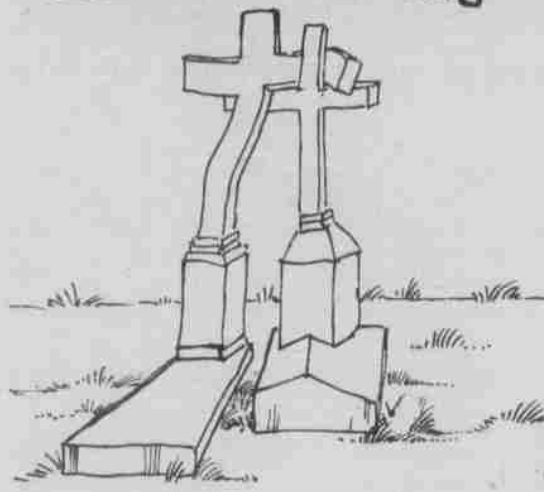
At present, these questions are being debated in the political arena; in the meantime, more environmental disasters — such as the 1973 Michigan cattle feed poisoning and the recent kepone poisoning — are sure to occur, which forces us to address another problem and economic headache for industry: Should the U.S. government enact legislation to compensate the victims of environmental disasters caused by toxic chemicals. Up until now, compensation has come through litigation or special ad hoc programs such as the one to compensate Michigan farmers for the 1973 cattle feed disaster. Recently, Rep. William Broakhead of Michigan has proposed a comprehensive policy program that would slap "use fees" on industry that produced toxic substances, and then compensate disaster victims by drawing from the collected revenues. On the surface, such a program sounds reasonable, but it could easily be blocked on the House floor because of industrial influence.

Resolution of the regulation issue is on the distant horizon; and, because the issue is, arguably, a value judgment, the solution will focus on the acceptability of risk. Some people might argue that risk from toxins is part and parcel of life in our industrial modern age, but how much risk is acceptable must be decided by society and our policy-makers. Utilitarian considerations and fairness to the job security of workers require that we live with some environmental toxins. But is it possible to determine a safe level of exposure without having to price the value of human life?

Probably not, so future policy-makers will undoubtedly have to make difficult trade-offs. But until then, all of us can, at the least, pray that Rachel Carson's dire prediction of a silent spring remains as fiction.

Peter Hapke, a senior ecology/English major from Asheville, is a staff writer for the *Daily Tar Heel*.

## LIVING CAUSES CANCER



DTH/Lee Poole

approval for their products. One of the companies, Chevron Chemical, had falsified IBT lab records covering six months of a two-year animal study on the Chevron insecticide Orthene. The study was made

## letters to the editor

# 'Frivolous' scientific research sometimes results in great discovery

To the editor:

Your editorial dealing with "frivolous" scientific research ("As if everyone didn't know," April 6) reveals a distressing attitude on your part concerning knowledge. If you do not understand something, you should investigate it, not dismiss it as a waste of time and money.

Do you not think that a parent's effects on a small child is an interesting research problem? Have you no curiosity as to how a week-old baby perceives his world? Such research could lead to important new ideas in child-rearing methods. Copernicus and Newton were called heretics, Columbus was merely a nut. Your attitude towards scientific investigation certainly has historical precedent.

So everyone knows TV commercials are louder than the programs. Does everyone know how much louder, or the effect of increased volume? To find out, all the research team probably had to do was place a sound level meter in front of the tube and watch it. How much could this have cost? Surely you have seen children sitting rooted before the tube. How does higher volume during junk food commercials effect them? If such findings led to toning down the ads, would it not be a blessing worth the expense?

I have seen Sen. Proxmire's lists. By what grace of God does he (or you) know what is "absurd?" Spinoffs from experiments going in a totally different direction have made your life easier. For example, new materials used in medicine originally developed for use by NASA. Every man-made item you touch — every plastic, metal, or cloth — was the result of someone's research. How many of these would appear to the narrow-minded to be foolishness? Attempts to develop a cheaper way to make a chemical used to make a chemical used to make ink may not be of earth-shattering significance, but it would enable you to print a cheaper paper.

Knowledge of the world we live in is extremely important, more so now with

diminishing natural resources and overpopulation than ever before. I imagine the fraction of money really wasted in these pursuits to be very small. You cannot know to what great discoveries a very minor one might lead. If you can't contribute to new ideas and knowledge, then don't detract from those who might.

Hubert O. Hayworth  
103 Grimes

anyone and everyone who would like to help us form a UNC Frisbee Club.

Talent, we're sure, abounds on campus, and a little practice goes a long way as evidenced by our strong showing on Saturday and Sunday. We had top ten finishers in both the Frisbee golf and MTA (maximum time aloft) events, and our ultimate (Frisbee football) team brought back the state championship trophy.

We're looking for seasoned pros, casual afternoon tossers, and curious

public forum the latest design in toilet paper dispensers. I had the misfortune of being exposed to one while in the new annex of the Wilson Library. Without deliberating on my personal frustrations, I'd like to know who is responsible for the adoption of this miserable invention at this University. The fiendish device could qualify as cruel and unusual punishment.

For those who have been spared, let me explain. Whereas advanced designs allow the roll to spin freely, and primitive designs are strictly immobile,

pushes this devilish product. He must have done one helluva job!

Now some have charged that this campus reeks of apathy. I hereby challenge all my fellow students of high principle to reveal the ineptitude of this notion by banding together as a united force to help eliminate these inhumane contraptions.

Robert D. Higgins  
U-5 Kingswood Apts.

### Co-op misnomer

To the editor:

I need to make a correction on the name of the co-op that I wrote about in Wednesday's *DTH*. The newly merged name is Community Foods, Inc. not Chapel Hill Foods, Inc. as I stated. Apologies to the co-op and to anyone who tried to find it under that name.

Teri Lynn Herbert  
Rt. 8 Box 68  
Chapel Hill

### Point system unfair

To the editor:

The 1977 session of the General Assembly of North Carolina House Bill Number 658 was passed to promote the public welfare by regulating rates to the end that they shall not be excessive, inadequate or unfairly discriminatory.

From my point of view they have missed the boat. OK — punish the drunken driver, the reckless driver, the speeder, the fellow who creates accidents. There is a big catch-basin. You get one point against you for each moving violation.

In Durham, at present, the congested areas in town carry a 35 miles per hour speed limit. Drive two to five miles out into safe areas and the posted limit is still 35. In these safe areas patrol cars sit on the side streets and wait for the victim cruising at 40 miles per hour. Records from our police department show that 90 percent of the arrests in 1977 were for citizens driving between 35 and 45 miles per hour. There were over 6,600 arrests, so it is easy to see that

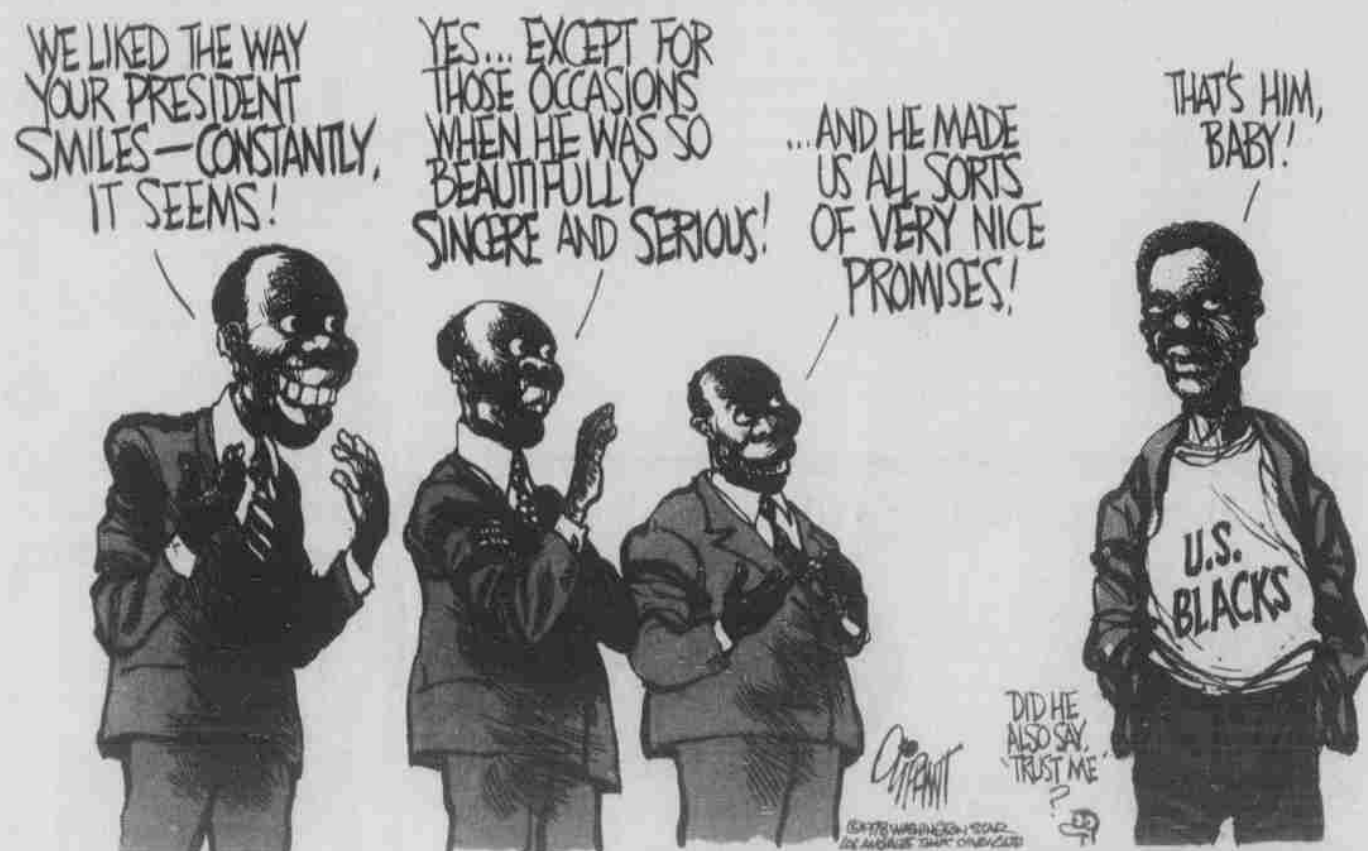
almost 6,000 people were victims caught driving in the area of 40 miles per hour.

Two such moving violations and you are punished as though you had driven 74 miles per hour. Four violations in your family and all of you are punished as though one had driven 80 miles per hour.

What is the answer? Try to get speed limits changed by your city councils. It does not always work. Recently I garnered 400 signatures to a petition to ask for an increase in speed limits on two streets. Our Public Works Committee passed it with the approval of the City Traffic Control office and when we appeared before the City Council, two people appeared against the petition and it was denied by unanimous vote.

Speed limits are unfair in fringe areas of many cities; the point system is unfair to safe drivers at 40 miles per hour. Let your representatives to the General Assembly hear from you. Call your city council officials and let them hear your protests!

Tom Reamer  
30 Stoneridge Circle  
Durham



Attn. frisbee flingers

To the editor:

This past weekend, Club West sent ten of its Frisbee throwing best down to Charlotte to compete in the first annual N.C. State Frisbee Tournament. This was the first such tournament in which UNC was represented, and we hope it won't be the last. So as to insure this, we will be having a meeting at 3:30 p.m. Wednesday in front of the Old Well for

beginners. No experience is necessary, just a desire to have some fun with a disc, although opportunities for serious competition will be available. Let's give Frisbee a home in Chapel Hill.

Signed by the 10 members of Club West

### Paper dispensers a pain

To the editor:

I'd like to bring to the attention of the

this new creation has the dysfunction of rotating 180 degrees before leaving the nonoffending victim holding the quantitatively insubstantial length of approximately five inches of toilet paper. This simply will not do the job.

Perhaps we have those fine engineers at State to credit with the creation of this subversive device. Nevertheless, I am either dismayed by the bureaucracy that allows the institutionalization of this pain-in-the-ass, or I am impressed by the persuasiveness of the salesman that

## Class of '78: How do you feel?

You're ready to graduate — how does it feel? Write and tell us your story. What is it like to be a senior — to be ready to graduate and leave Carolina?

Maybe you haven't gotten a job yet. Maybe there's the unsettling thought that there's so much left of college life that you haven't done yet. Maybe you're upset because you realize you may never see your best friends again. Or maybe it's a case of senior panic.

Responses should be typed, double-spaced on a 60-space line. Mail or bring them to the features department by Wednesday, April 12. Include name, address and phone number.