

# On asbestos safety levels

Recent comments on the asbestos problem at the Science I building illustrate how little some public officials know about cancer risks and how little the public is consequently told. Unfortunately, affected persons may gain a false sense of security from reassurances that are uttered.

Wednesday's Emerald quoted one University official as saying that University air sampling at the time of the student-faculty petition asking for removal of the asbestos showed "the airborne asbestos was not a health threat, but we wished to be responsive."

But wait. Here is another official saying in the same article that "levels were unacceptable" and that "any amount of asbestos exposure is considered to present an increased risk."

How could the first official say flatly that the asbestos "was not a health threat" if the second official is correct that "any amount of asbestos" presents some degree of health risk?

The University administra-

When cancer does strike, it is sometimes possible to recover financial damages. The Register-Guard reported Sunday that 39 former asbestos workers have won \$4.5 million against companies they used to work for. But as their attorney said, "Money can never replace somebody's health, or, in some cases, somebody's life."

Many people believe that the government sets out regulatory standards showing which levels of carcinogens like asbestos or carbaryl (used for gypsy moths) are safe. This is generally wrong. Under current law and practice, government standards are almost always based on subjectively balancing the cost or feasibility of taking action against the benefits of such action. The levels selected are not "safe" levels. They are levels of "acceptable injury or risk."

The problem of some public officials setting standards on one basis (such as economic balancing), and of others assuming that the decisions represent something else (such as safety from any health damage), occurs in many situations.

Complicating things further is the fact that a significant portion of the safety testing for pesticides and drugs in this country has been fraudulent. Three testing company officials were convicted in Chicago last December for falsifying data. Their company was the largest testing laboratory for pesticide and drug "safety" information in the United States.

The result of all this is that much of what Americans, inside and outside universities, assume about safety and official standards for things like asbestos exposure amounts to a series of illusions.

I will be discussing these and related matters in my public seminar, "Gypsy Moths, Cancer, and Illusions of Environmental Policy," on Oct. 8 at 2:45 p.m. in Gilbert Hall. The talk was originally inspired by the headlines about gypsy moths invading Lane County this year. It now seems equally applicable to the possible con-

tinuing asbestos dangers at Science I.

Each employee must decide for herself or himself whether the risks of staying in the building during asbestos removal or afterward are greater or lesser than the inconvenience of moving out until all asbestos is gone.

To do this, employees need to know just how much — or how little — we really know about whether even minuscule asbestos levels could cause cancer in some people. They may have received such information elsewhere, but statements that asbestos levels are not a health threat have the potential to mislead.

By John Bonine

John Bonine is a professor of law and author of a just-published book, "The Law of Environmental Protection."

## Commentary

tion should be praised for taking action to remove the hazardous asbestos on Science I's exterior (and hopefully, interior soon as well). But can anyone insist that the levels inside Science I before, during, or after the exterior removal are "safe" for any particular person?

Reports by the National Academy of Sciences, National Cancer Institute and others state that no one has demonstrated that cancer-causing substances have "safe" levels, no matter how minimal the amount of exposure. One problem is that one person can be as much as 100,000 times more susceptible to cancer than the person sitting at the next desk. Unfortunately, no one will know who the susceptible person was until 10 or 20 years later, if and when cancer strikes (mesothelioma, or cancer of the pleural space next to the lungs, in the case of asbestos).

**Coffee Bean of the Month**



**Costa Rican**  
**\$4.65** per pound  
**50¢ Off Per Pound**

860 E. 13th    344-7894

**EUGENE HARDWARE**

A COMPLETE SELECTION

- Hinges & Latches
- Master Mechanic Tools
- Screws & Bolts
- Keys Duplicated
- Cleaning Supplies
- Paint & Supplies
- Lawn & Garden Supplies
- Stove Pipe
- Lock Sets & Security Latches
- Chain & Snaps
- Wire & Rope
- Plumbing & Electrical

**2825 WILLAMETTE    342-5191**

**Nina's Submarine**  
Some Call Them  
"Hoagies"  
They Are Different!  
510 E. Broadway • 343-6235

**gerlach's**  
849 E 13TH AVE  
WE OFFER SPEED, QUALITY AND ECONOMY IN PHOTO PROCESSING\*  
\*PICK ANY TWO



**EXPRESS YOURSELF!**  
**WITH A FLAG ON YOUR WALL**  
FROM THE PEOPLE WHO BRING YOU KITES  
**KITES AND OTHER DELIGHTS**  
COURTYARD LEVEL • FIFTH STREET PUBLIC MARKET • 344-KITE





Coupons in the Emerald save you money.  
Check every page, every day. It pays.

## Good news from Trailways:

---

# MORE BUSES

**We've just increased our schedule. Now there are more buses daily between Eugene and Seattle and all points in between.**

Schedule

<p><b>5 TIMES DAILY TO:</b> Portland Albany Salem</p> <p><b>4 TIMES DAILY TO:</b> Seattle Tacoma Vancouver</p>	<p><b>2 TIMES DAILY TO:</b> Ft. Lewis Olympia Chehalis Kelso-Longview Roseburg Grants Pass Medford</p>
--	--

---

# LESS MONEY

We're lowering fares like you've never seen. The fact is, you can't help but save money on Trailways. **Two for One\*** Beginning October 4 through November 10, pay one fare to anywhere Trailways Lines, Inc. goes, take a companion with you free. (Both passengers must travel together.) And the deal gets better. **Save 25%\*** Purchase any Trailways Lines, Inc. ticket from October 4 until November 10, at Eugene, Seattle, or any point in between and you'll get a coupon good for 25% off. Discount must be used at any of those same

places from November 11 through December 15. **Save on Shipping, Too** Plus there are great deals from the same places on Redibox® (\$2 off October 1 through November 10) and Package Express (50% off October 1 through November 10). And of course, low fares everywhere to Sacramento and 12,000 other destinations. So with more buses and less money, there's only one way to go. Go Trailways.

**957 PEARL ST.  
(503) 342-5331**

---

# Go Trailways™

\*These special discounts can be purchased from selected cities only. Call Trailways for details. Discounts good on Trailways Lines, Inc. Not good with other discounts. Subject to I.C.C. approval.