

Organization strives to place food-labeling issue on ballot

By Scott McFetridge
Of the Emerald

A newly formed group is seeking to place an initiative on the November ballot to ensure that all food treated with radioactive gamma rays, used to kill insects and bacteria, is plainly labeled.

When telling people about the food irradiation, "No one can believe it," Portland resident Hale Weitzman said. "People just laugh and say they can't believe something like that is allowed."

The Coalition to Label Irradiated Food, organized by Weitzman, has gathered about 5,000 signatures but must obtain about 75,000 more by early July in order to place the initiative on the ballot, he said.

The use of radiation, called picowaves, is designed to kill insects and bacteria in food and prevent spoilage. Backers of food irradiation claim the process would extend the shelf life of foods and could decrease the use of chemical pesticides.

Low-level irradiation of wheat, potatoes and spices already is permissible, although there is little commercial use of the process, said James Green, a spokesman for the Food and Drug Administration. Only some spices used in processed foods currently are irradiated, he said.

But use of the irradiation method soon may be expanded to fruits and vegetables. The FDA approved a plan to broaden the use of radiation in foods in December 1985, but the plan also must be approved by the Office of Management and Budget.

Given the level we're using, the process

is definitely safe," Green said. "There is no safety concern whatsoever."

If the OMB approves the irradiation plan, food manufacturers must plainly indicate that the food has been "picowaved," but this requirement could be waived after two years. Because members of the Coalition to Label Irradiated Food question the safety of food irradiation, they believe labeling should be required indefinitely, Weitzman said.

Although the initiative will require only labeling of the irradiated food, Weitzman's group also questions any use of radiation on food. Despite the government's claims, some experts say the process drastically changes the molecular structure of foods and may have unknown effects, Weitzman said.

And much of the radiation used on the food would be supplied by wastes from the production of nuclear warheads and from commercial nuclear power plants, Weitzman said.

"A lot of people think it's just being pushed through by the nuclear power industry," Weitzman said.

Green said the use of radiation on foods could be a cost-saving measure for the nuclear power industry, but he doesn't see this as a problem.

Nuclear waste "could be turned into a positive instead of something that normally is costly to dispose of," Green said. "That's a positive, not a negative."

Weitzman said he hopes several other statewide groups, including the Oregon State Public Interest Research Group, will help his group gather signatures in order to meet the July deadline.

Police beat

The following is a list of University-area crimes reported to the Eugene Police Department within the past week.

A microwave valued at \$129 was stolen from Walton complex Feb. 6 at 11:30 a.m.

A vehicle was driven across the lawn near McAlister dormitory Feb. 6 at 11:50 p.m., causing \$50 damage. An investigation into the incident is continuing.

Thirteen dollars was stolen from an office in the Law Center building Feb. 6-7.

Graffiti was written on the walls of a women's restroom in

the EMU between Feb. 7-11. Damage was estimated at \$225.

A television set valued at \$399 was stolen from a University Inn lounge Saturday between 3-9 a.m.

A bicycle wheel and tire valued at \$65 were stolen from Robbins dormitory Sunday at 12:30 p.m.

Odin Dean Sanders, 26, 1866 Harris St., was cited and released in connection with a wallet theft at the Law Library on Sunday at 2:15 p.m.

A backpack and contents valued at \$70 were stolen from

the University Bookstore on Monday between 3:30-5:30 p.m.

Police are investigating a hit and run incident involving a vehicle that caused damage to two parking meters Tuesday in front of McArthur Court.

A purse and contents valued at \$135 were stolen from 1430 Orchard St. on Tuesday between 2:30-3:30 p.m. The wallet was recovered later in the street in front of McArthur Court and returned to its owner.

Eight bicycles were stolen; none was recovered.

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