

Soap Can Cause Skin Irritation, Doctor Declares

London - (Science Service) - Cleanliness may be next to godliness, but soap sometimes causes people trouble, Dr. F. Ray Bettley, physician for diseases of the skin at Middlesex hospital here, suggests. He reports studies showing that soap may increase skin permeability and thus allow alkali to reach and irritate cells below the surface of the skin (malpighian cells).

Thus, barrier creams that have soap bases should not be used by industrial workers, Dr. Bettley reports in the British Medical Journal. The creams, far from preventing industrial dermatitis, may substantially increase the risk.

Less Harmful Effects
Dr. Bettley also reports a series of experiments that indicate less harmful effects to the deep cells of the skin from certain detergents.

He says commercial soaps have generally good antiseptic properties but perhaps more important than this is their ability to wash away the germs on the surface of the hands.

Washing with soap tends to destroy the self-sterilizing power of the skin by lowering its acidity, Dr. Bettley says, but also leaves behind a deposit that may in some degree make up for the loss.

The various effects of washing with soap are antagonistic, he points out, and says that furunculosis (associated with boils) commonly affects the area of the skin that are washed most frequently. The avoidance of shaving soap is often sufficient to cure folliculitis, a disease of the hair glands.

No Irritation Found
However, Dr. Bettley has used a cleanser composed of five per cent toilet soap and five per cent pure potassium permanganate in the treatment of eczema and other skin diseases. Over a period of one month, patients, nurses and doctors found no irritation except when the cleanser was used in contact with ulcerated surfaces.

"I do not wish to imply that soap plays no part in hand eczemas," he wrote, "but the observations I have mentioned indicate a need for caution in arriving at general conclusions."

In the case of housewives who use soap, he says he has found no proof that irritation results, and "the effect of rubber gloves is often, I think, clearly more harmful still."

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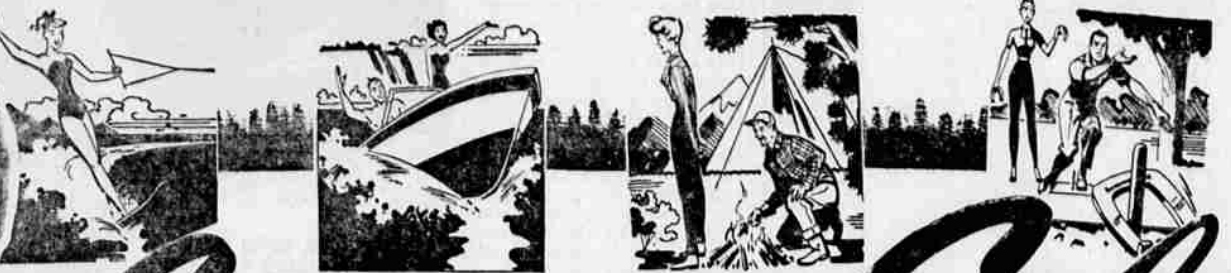
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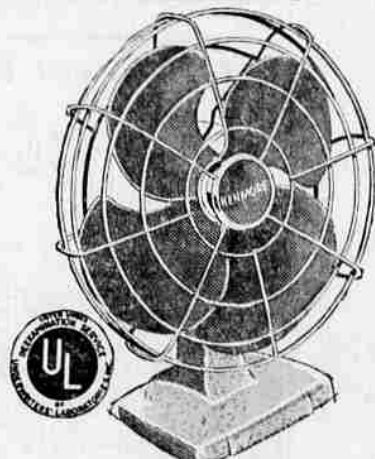
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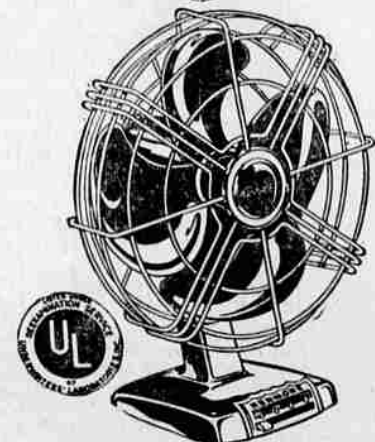
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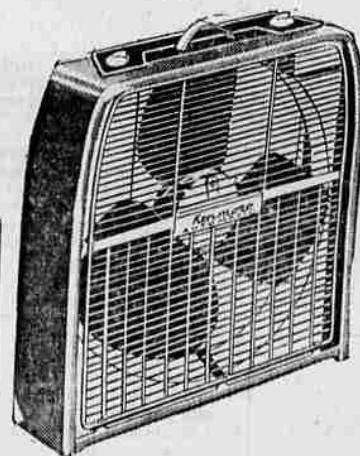
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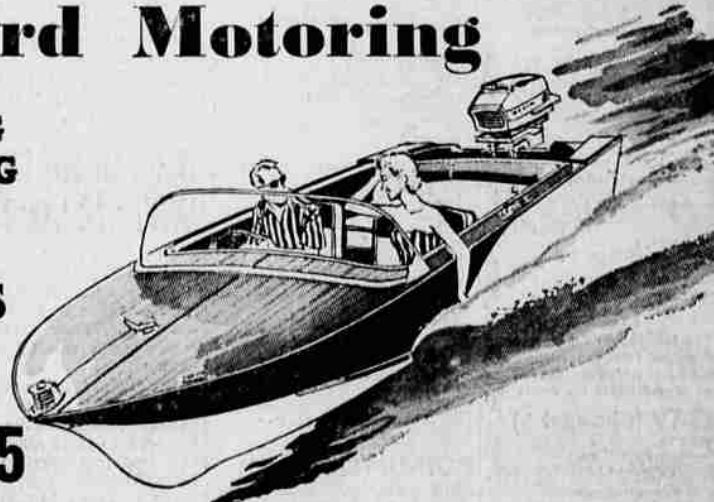
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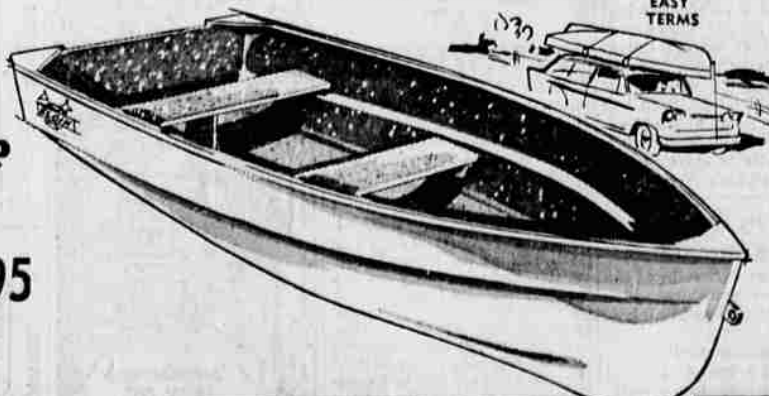
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