

From the CDC

Smoking-related healthcare costs escalate

The tab for smoking-related illness in 1993 tallied some \$50 billion in healthcare costs, according to a study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This cost is based on a survey of 35,000 persons across the United States.

Overall, at least 7% of all health-care costs can be attributed to lighting up. State and federal governments pay for more than 43% of all smoking-related medical expenses, with older smokers consuming more than 60% of government monies. This tab does not include time lost at work because of smoking-related sickness.

From the FDA

Breast exam device rejected

An advisory panel to the agency has rejected the Sensor Pad, a device intended to assist women in detecting lumps during their monthly self-breast examinations.

Despite hearing testimony from at least one woman who detected a lump with the aid of the pad that even an earlier mammogram did not find, the advisors rejected the device fearing it would actually *hide* lumps.

Two sheets of plastic seal the pad's silicone gel contents. According to the instructions, the 10-inch pad is placed over the breast aiding the woman to examine the contours of something as small as a grain of salt.

The inventor of the Sensor Pad,

Earl Wright, was instructed to conduct studies testing the efficacy of the device on ordinary women. Other recommendations made were for physicians-in-training to test the device on women about to undergo a biopsy procedure. The panel also suggested that surveys be conducted to see if women think of the device as a substitute for fingertip examination. The other concern is whether women would stop going for routine breast examinations if this device became commercially available.

From the EPA

Regulations for medical incinerators to be proposed

The Environmental Protection Agency is ready to take steps to reduce the levels of dioxin in the environment, particularly those from medical and garbage incinerators. Proposed regulations for controlling emittants from incinerators are expected to be unveiled by the agency in February.

Dioxin is one of the most common incinerator emittants. Most of the dioxin to which humans are exposed is transmitted indirectly via agricultural products that have been exposed to the chemical. Because of this link, the Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration are conducting the study along with the EPA to determine levels of dioxin found in food.

Final results of the study are expected by late 1995. However, the preliminary, or draft, study did find that the dioxin levels in the environment are falling, with only about

30 pounds now produced annually in the United States. The draft study will be examined by the Science Advisory Board, an oversight group, after being open for public comment for 120 days.

From the PHS

Illegal drug use up, concern down

The more-than-a-decade decline in illegal drug use has leveled off, according to a survey taken by the the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. In particular, the number of hard-core drug users has remained at 1985 levels.

The survey was based on responses from more than 26,000 face-to-face interviews with household members from across the United States.

Although the report found at least 500,000 cocaine users, government officials estimate the number to be four times greater, because the survey did not reach the heaviest drug users.

The number of persons aged 35 years and older who used illegal drugs in 1993 rose to 7.5 million, up from 6 million in 1992 and 7.4 million in 1991. Among teenagers, the news is not much better: 2.1 million teenagers reported smoking marijuana in 1993, compared with 1.7 million in 1992.

On the decline was the number of crack cocaine users among adults aged 26 to 34 years: 88.2% reported using crack cocaine in 1993, compared with 90.1% the year before. ♦