

EDB and Other Hazards

While Margaret Heckler, secretary of health and human services, is to be commended for her recognition of the hazards of EDB residues on food, her Feb. 14 proposals, allowing widespread use of radiation as "a safe alternative" and rejecting FDA's recommendation for the labeling of radiated food, reflect both questionable science and public policy.

While not radioactive, irradiated food contains stable radiolytic products whose chemical identity and toxicology are poorly defined. Industry claims for the safety of irradiated food largely depend on insensitive conventional animal feeding tests, rather than

the more critical long-term feeding tests of concentrated extracts for carcinogenic and other chronic toxic effects.

There is little need for a choice between the known hazards of EDB and the unknown hazards of irradiated food. There are a wide range of known safe alternatives to EDB, including aluminum phosphide for grains and cold storage for fruits and vegetables. Similar considerations obtain for another major source of avoidable public exposure to EDB atmospheric pollution, resulting from its use as a fuel additive in leaded gasoline, whose federal phase-out is now well overdue.

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