



by **PETER G. HAMMOND**
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Drug abuse prevention has not escaped America's propensity to deal with social problems by dumping them on our educational school system. We have unjustly demanded that education accomplish overnight what law enforcement, the medical profession, and others have failed to do. If the task is the same—preventing all illegal drug use—school systems will also fail.

Any progress the school systems make will be a result of modification of goals, flexibility of curriculum, certification exemptions, and emphasis on decision making. Unfortunately, there is little or no evidence of these essential changes.

Education, as in "drug abuse education," is primarily indoctrination or attempts to persuade through communication. Selected information which supports preconceived notions of the drug problem is presented to students corralled in assemblies or health classes. Success is measured by the number of students reached and quantities of materials distributed. The assumption is made that so-called "facts" about drugs will change attitudes and result in predetermined behavior change.

This approach to drug education is defective and counter productive. Yet, it characterizes more than fifty

per cent of our national effort and is fostered and supported by federal, state and local governments. In the next column, the why's of drug abuse education failure will be discussed.

Many communities working to prevent drug misuse only need a place in the community where young people can talk to each other, and in the process, head off reliance on drugs. These facilities are known as "awareness houses," "listening posts," "frustration forums," and "rap centers." Whatever the facility is called, what's needed is a place to meet (regularly), some money, man-hours, professional counseling. What we caution about other programs applies equally as well to awareness houses.

Many communities have discovered that its young people turn to drugs because they cannot "find themselves," because they feel cut off and adrift from society. In some towns, "awareness houses" have been founded to provide a place, a setting, for self-discovery and open-ended discussion. Operating under guidance, but *not* adult direction, awareness houses give kids a place to talk it out, to find common ground with each other, and frequently, to find out more about themselves.

The basics are a storefront or meeting room, a volunteer or part-time counseling staff or single professional, and the usual support services of clerical work and maintenance. The key to the awareness house concept is responsibility. The center will probably be most effective if

The Old Timer



"Uncle Sam gets most of our funds, so Washington, D.C. should be named 'Fund City.'"

the young people who use it are given major control over its operation. Responsibility, in many cases, leads to self-discipline and self-awareness, and these, in turn, can help a young man or woman head off drug reliance before it becomes a too-welcome crutch.

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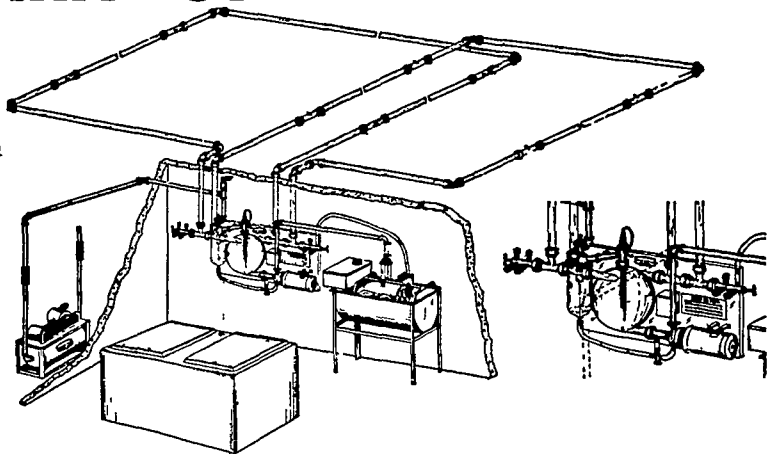
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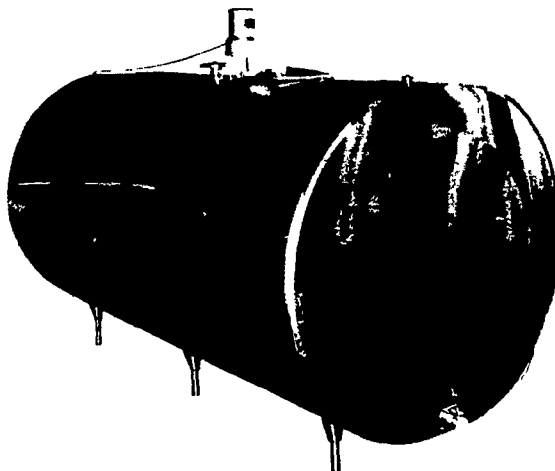
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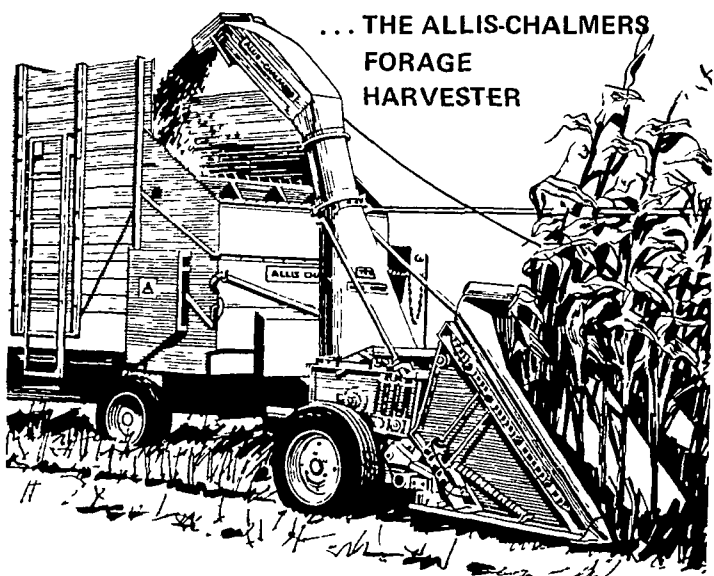
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