

Fuel Shortage Expected to Have Minimal Effect on Nation's Health

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HEW Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger has stated that the effects of the fuel shortage on the nation's health should be "minimal", if common sense prevails.

"Our medical specialists report," Secretary Weinberger said, "that a reduction in room temperatures from 72 to even down to 60 degrees would have no effect on the likelihood of an individual contracting a common cold, influenza or pneumonia, and by the same token, a reduction to 68 would certainly have no ill effects."

"Many will develop these illnesses this winter, as they do every winter, but reduced heating will not be the culprit."

The Secretary made those observations in releasing a paper on the impact of the energy shortage on health, prepared in the Office of Dr. Charles C. Edwards, Assistant Secretary for Health.

Secretary Weinberger

noted that the six degree temperature reduction recommended for the nation's schools would be well within the range of temperature reduction that would not adversely affect health.

Dr. Edwards said that while temperatures can be uncomfortable, particularly if they are achieved too quickly, they by themselves are not harmful to health.

"This is not to say that anyone will enjoy the energy shortages," said Dr. Edwards, "but we can handle the situation without danger to health by following a few common sense precautions."

Among those cited were:

- Avoid unnecessary discomfort in adjusting to lower room and office temperatures by turning the thermostat down gradually over a period of several days rather than all at once.
- Wear enough warm clothing to keep comfortable.
- Try to maintain as high a room humidity level as possible.

General health rules to be kept in mind, said Dr. Edwards, include:

- Reduced temperatures,

moving from warm to cooler temperatures, and being wet and cold—while certainly uncomfortable—do not increase the risk of catching colds, influenza and pneumonia.

— Since most bacteria and viruses grow better at higher temperatures, some experts feel that cooler living may even be a benefit in disease control.

— There are no special heating requirements for infants, preschoolers, young children or pregnant women. Their needs are no different from those of healthy adults.

— The average new-born child can cope quite well with home temperatures as low as 60 degrees if clothed and in a home where the humidity is kept as high as possible.

Dr. Edwards said that any nutritional effects of the energy crisis "will not be the result of any temperature change, but will come from restrictions in transport, school closings, unemployment, inflated prices, and agricultural shortages."

He said that there are "only minimal requirements for increased calorie intake— not more than 100 additional

calories a day to adjust to 60 degrees as opposed to 72 degrees."

"For some individuals," said Dr. Edwards, "particularly the affluent, overweight person, reduced temperatures may assist in weight reduction since more calories will be used to maintain body heat and there probably will be more physical activity."

According to Dr. Edwards, "only a handful of common chronic diseases are aggravated by severe temperature reduction." He cited myxedema (thyroid under-activity) peripheral vascular disorder, arthritis, angina pectoris, and diabetes mellitus.

"But the majority of patients with these can accommodate to lower temperatures without harm to health if they reduce their thermostats gradually," he said.

Dr. Edwards said householders should remember that "the elderly have a slower adaptation time than young adults to shifts of temperature," and that "low humidity in a hot room can be harmful to some respiratory disorders."

"Many older individuals will take a month or longer to become accustomed to a 10 degree temperature reduction," he said, "but the vast majority of the elderly can stand lower temperatures," he said, "with no harm to their health."

Personal health problems to be avoided, said Dr. Edwards, include electrical hazards, and the danger of explosion or fire from the storage or transport of gasoline.

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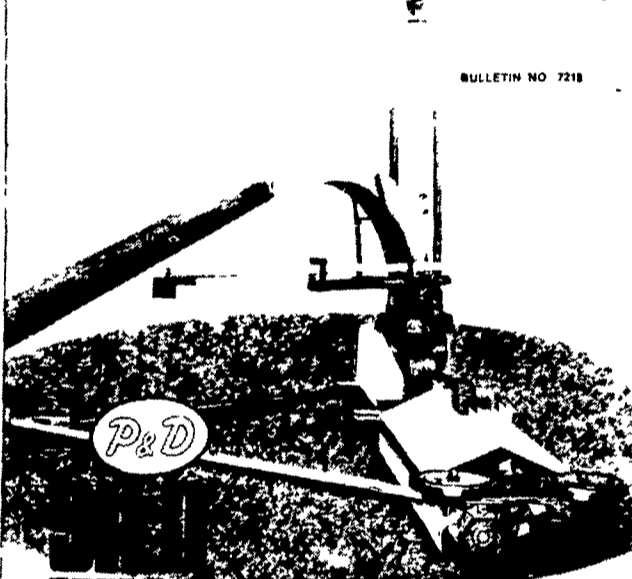
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