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features

Battalion/Page 12
November 17, 1982

Now you know

United Press International
For years scientists have used computer models to predict the behavior of fires. Until recently, the efforts involved hypothetical fires. But that's now changing. Leonard Copper, an engineer at the National Bureau of Standards Center For Fire Research in Maryland, used data from controlled fires to calculate how long prison inmates could remain safe in their cells. Copper built four prototype cells based on maximum security cell plans. The cells differed only in the doors: bars or solid slab with windows. He found that with good door ventilation, cell fires burned faster.

Warped

USC doctor concerned

United Press International
Are video games hazardous to children's health — as the nation's Surgeon General C. Everett Koop said in Pittsburgh? It depends, authorities say. Even Koop, a Philadelphia pediatrician, later made it plain he was expressing a personal opinion that was not based on scientific evidence.

That clarification came after the National Coin Machine Institute accused Koop of making a "rash and unthinking, thinly veiled bid for media exposure" that might damage "a legitimate and important industry, one of the few where employment remains high."

Concerned experts say the trouble with criticizing video games is that there is no nice, neat body of research that can provide answers to questions about the effect of the games on developing children and adolescents.

Since video games came on the scene almost out of nowhere, they have not been around long

enough to have been studied scientifically.

They are tucked into candy stores near schools, sprawled in huge arcades, make money for activities on college campuses, gobble quarters in bars, and almost everywhere have established a beachhead in homes and even hospitals.

Most concern about video games stems from concern over the unknown long-range effect on kids who become video game addicts. A report at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics last month claimed this is happening and some kids skip school to keep playing.

The report from Dr. H. James Holroyd, University of Southern California "technology abuse" specialist and professor of pediatrics, said some children finance their play with snatched quarters.

Holroyd defines "technology abuse" as the misuse of video games, wearable stereos, television and cars.

The La Canada, Calif., pediatrician said he documented reports from Gamblers Anonymous that greatly disturb him when he thinks of kids hooked on video games — the newest possible victims of "technology abuse."

Holroyd said the GA studies show those who get into the worst trouble gambling were hooked on pinball machines in adolescence.

The time that addicted kids spend before video game sets — in arcades or in their homes — upsets Holroyd.

The youngsters are missing social interaction, schoolwork, exercise — main threats in the life of an adolescent's life, Hill said.

Holroyd predicted how kids have a good chance of growing up as stunted adults — intellectually, emotionally and perhaps not even physically — due to trading off sports exercise time for long, dull, tedious hours with the video game.

On the lower level of Pennsylvania Station in New York, kids outside a huge video arcade intercept commuters beg for quarters.

Should these kids be in school? If they don't get quarters by begging, is a ripe target for the next step: Are they addicted?

This scene is not rare on the electronic game.

In East Bernard, Texas, Ann Leveridge, president of National PTA, says truancy and video games is a nationwide phenomenon. "Everywhere I go people are talking about video games," she said. "They've caused some problems."

Leveridge has been in Louisiana over the past 15 months and concern over video games comes from everywhere. The PTA board she adopted a position statement on video games.

"The PTA is concerned about the increasing number of video game sites which may have an adverse effect on many of our young people, who frequent such establishments," the report begins.

"Initial studies have shown that game sites are often in close proximity to schools. In many cases there is not adequate control of access by school-age children during school hours which compounds the problem of school absenteeism and truancy."

"Where little or no supervision exists, drug-selling, drug use, drinking, gambling, increased gang activities and other such behaviors may be seen."

"Where there is diligent supervision and adequate lighting, however, the interest of the customers centers on the game."

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