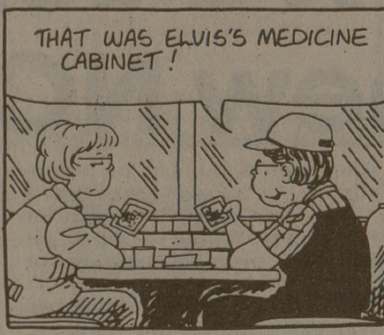


ET CETERA

Funky Winkerbean



by Tom Batiuk

Dozens are sickened by chemical fire

Associated Press

THERMAL, Calif. — A chemical spill and fire at a pesticide plant released a 300-foot cloud of black vapor Wednesday, sickening about 50 people and forcing the evacuation of this desert community's 1,000 residents.

The fire, reported at 6:30 a.m. at Wilbur-Ellis Co., ignited tons of pesticides inside the plant. At least 49 people were treated for nausea, dizziness and vomiting.

"We were told to evacuate the premises because there had been an explosion," Maria Ramirez said. "We got out of the house real quick. We got kind of sick with the smoke."

Ramirez went to a Red Cross shelter after she and her son, 10, were evacuated from their home about 75 miles north of the Mexican border.

A series of explosions was reported, but Coachella Fire Department dispatchers could not confirm them.

Insecticides, pesticides and other agricultural products — including parathion, paraquat, diazane, corbine 8 and sodium nitrate — were among the chemicals stored in the warehouse, said Riverside County Fire Department spokesman Dana Jones. Gasoline and diesel fuel supplies were also stored in the structure, he said.

About 3,000 pounds of the highly toxic insecticide malathion were also believed to be among the stored chemicals in the plant, authorities said.

"The fire is not contained," said the dispatcher for the Coachella Fire Department who asked not to be identified. "We cannot use water."

Water is reactive with many of the chemicals and can cause the release of additional gases.

"We're not putting any more water on the fire to allow it to burn itself out," Jones said.

Pandas

Mexico's Pe-Pe and Ying-Ying have twins

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — Pe-Pe and Ying-Ying, Mexico's panda pair, have added twins to their family, and medical service personnel were mothering the tinier of the two while Ying-Ying cared for the other, Chapultepec Park Zoo administrator Maria Elena Hoyo said Wednesday.

Ying-Ying began taking care of the first twin as soon as it was born at 1:05 p.m. Tuesday, Hoyo said, but the mother ignored the second twin born two hours and five minutes later.

"She didn't reject it," she said. "She's dedicated herself to the first one and didn't seem to notice the second."

Zoo veterinarian Patricia Reyes said six or seven members of the zoo medical service will take turns holding the smaller panda and an incubator will be used only in case of emergency.

"They're white, they look like little rats," the veterinarian said in an interview.

"It needs the warmth of the mother and when that is lacking, human warmth," she said. An incubator, she said, "is a different kind of warmth."



"We can't say that we have won the battle 100 percent," Reyes said, noting that the smaller one is about half the size of the other baby. But she added that there had been no significant problems the first day and that "it moves and cries pretty loud."

"It appears to have a good appetite and looks like it's in good health," Hoyo said. But she added, "no one has been able to raise them that way," away from the mother. She said the panda baby would be held for 40 to 50 days.

Ying-Ying and the other baby also appear to be healthy, Hoyo said. She said no photographers would be allowed near the newborn pandas for some time, perhaps weeks.

Hoyo said the smaller one is believed to be a male, weighs 2.4 ounces and is 5.6 inches long and has about a 50 percent chance of survival. Because the first baby is with Ying-Ying, it will be six months before zoo doctors touch it, Hoyo said.

The twins were the fourth and fifth offspring of Ying-Ying and Pe-Pe, given to Mexico by China on Sept. 10, 1975, making them among the most prolific pandas in captivity in the Western world. They will be 11 years old this year.

Ying-Ying's first baby was born in 1980, but the mother accidentally crushed it to death eight days after it was born.

Tohui, now weighing 308 pounds and nearly as large as his father, was born July 21, 1981. Liang-Liang, who weighs 266 pounds, was born on June 22, 1983.

The gestation period for the twins was 90 days, less than that of the other two, Reyes said.

Raw milk possibly used in cheese

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Citing a "strong possibility" that unpasteurized milk was deliberately used in tainted Mexican-style cheese, a district attorney announced a criminal probe Wednesday of a bacterial outbreak that has killed 48 people since mid-March.

A search warrant citing suspicions of involuntary manslaughter and of several other crimes was used to seize records at Jalisco Mexican Products Inc. late Tuesday, authorities said.

Sue McPherson, wife of the company president, said Jalisco would decline immediate comment but would have a statement later.

District Attorney Ira Reiner said records showed the Jalisco plant in Artesia received about 10 percent more unpasteurized milk per month than was pasteurized for its final product, indicating that unpasteurized milk somehow was mixed into the cheese.

Still unanswered, Reiner said, was "the question of whether this introduction of substantial nonpasteurized milk in the product is the cause of the listeria which has caused many deaths," but he added: "Presently there is a strong suspicion that is the cause."

He said investigators found during the weekend that the plant's pasteurization equipment was working properly and that unpasteurized milk could not have been introduced into the cheese inadvertently.

"It raises the strong possibility of food with the fraudulent intent to sell."

Asked about the involuntary manslaughter mentioned in the warrant, Reiner said: "It has not yet been determined if use of nonpasteurized milk in their product caused the listeria."

The warrant on file in Municipal Court also cited suspicions of conspiracy to commit such crimes as the unlawful sale of adulterated milk products and the unlawful sale of unsanitary milk products, which do not conform to state standards, unlawful possession of non-aged cheese made from unpasteurized milk, unlawful sale of adulterated food, unlawful adulteration of food, unlawful receipt and delivery of adulterated food, and adulteration

Board delays insurance rate decision

Associated Press

AUSTIN — The State Board of Insurance Wednesday postponed a decision on a staff recommendation for a \$58 million homeowners' insurance premium increase — a statewide average hike of 6.7 percent.

Overall, the board staff recommended a net increase of \$28 million, or 2.2 percent, on rates for homeowners, renters, fire, extended coverage, farm and ranch owners

and related coverages. The insurance industry wants a 10.2 percent overall increase in premiums, including a 15.8 percent average hike in homeowners' insurance.

After two hours of presentations from the staff and the Texas Insurance Advisory Association, Board Chairman Lyndon Olson said the case would be taken "under advisement." He did not indicate when a ruling would be made.

The staff recommendation was presented by actuary Gaylon Daniel, who told the board that property insurance "offers the potential for catastrophic loss."

"We were all recently reminded of the Gulf Coast's vulnerability to hurricanes," Daniel said. "And it is an accepted fact that northern and western areas of the state have experienced severe tornado and hail losses on several occasions."

The staff proposal includes a \$58-million (6.7 percent) increase in homeowners' coverage, a \$23-million decrease (25 percent) cut in renters' insurance and a \$1 million (4 percent) hike in farm and ranch coverage.

The industry proposal, presented by the Texas Insurance Advisory Association, includes a 15.8 percent hike in homeowners' coverage, a 17.2 percent cut in renters' insurance and a 15.8 percent hike in farm and ranch coverage.

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