

Lead pollution, alcoholism linked, A&M professor says

By Paige Hinkle
Reporter

A Texas A&M psychology professor has found evidence linking high levels of environmental pollutants in the bloodstream to high levels of alcohol intake in a study on laboratory rats.

Dr. Jack Nation said his research indicated there is a molecular and behavioral link between lead pollution and alcoholism.

Nation said his research does not prove that high lead levels are the cause of alcoholism in humans, because alcoholism is an extraordinarily complex disorder with many determinants.

However, Nation said, if it is biologically possible that someone could be an alcoholic, high lead levels in the body could contribute to the alcoholism.

"My guess is that lead and cadmium toxicity merely aggravate an existing condition," Nation said.

In the studies, he said, laboratory rats exposed to dietary lead consumed larger amounts of a 10 percent alcohol solution under stressful conditions than did rats not exposed to lead.

Nation said that although factory workers who work with lead and cadmium are more likely to have high levels of these chemicals in their bodies, the average person today has 100 times more lead in his body than people did years ago.

Lead, which is the No. 1 chemical pollutant in the nation, is environmentally distributed through automobile emissions, Nation said. Eventually, the lead gets into the aquifers in the earth and is transferred everywhere through these water systems, he said. So lead works its way into the food supply and people eat it, Nation said.

He said cadmium can be found in factories involved with electroplating and galvanizing. Cadmium also can be found in cigarette tobacco, he

said, so heavy smokers are likely to take in higher amounts of it than non-smokers.

Nation said this research is part of a broad area known as behavioral toxicology. He said it has received attention in the United States for the last decade, although it was being studied in the Soviet Union 30 or 40 years ago.

The primary concerns of behavioral toxicology, Nation said, are the effects of environmental contamination on systems expressing emotional and motor behaviors. He said behavioral toxicology also studies the effects of chemicals on learning and memory because researchers realize that chemical pollutants can affect people without showing obvious signs.

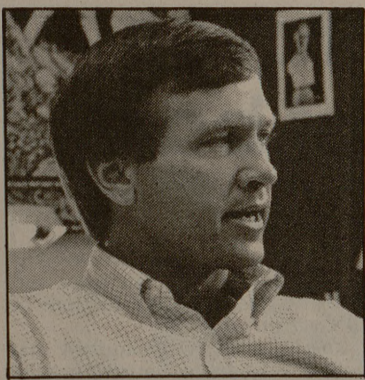
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Dr. Jack Nation, an A&M psychology professor.

Nation said researchers now have to determine if increased alcohol consumption is truly stress-mediated.

One of the major human problems related to elevated anxiety levels is alcoholism, Nation said, because alcohol can be consumed in an effort to keep anxiety levels within manageable limits.

However, he said, alcohol is unique because it has anxiety-reducing properties and caloric prop-



Jack Nations

erties. So, he said, behavioral and biochemical investigations are being conducted to determine whether animals consume alcohol as a food source or to reduce anxiety.

"If these studies help us understand the molecular nature of alcohol intake, perhaps, pharmacologically speaking, we will be able to control alcohol abuse through chemical means," Nation said.

He said a team of British investigators conducted a massive study in 1982 in which it found a strong positive correlation between high blood-lead levels and large amounts of alcohol consumed on a daily basis.

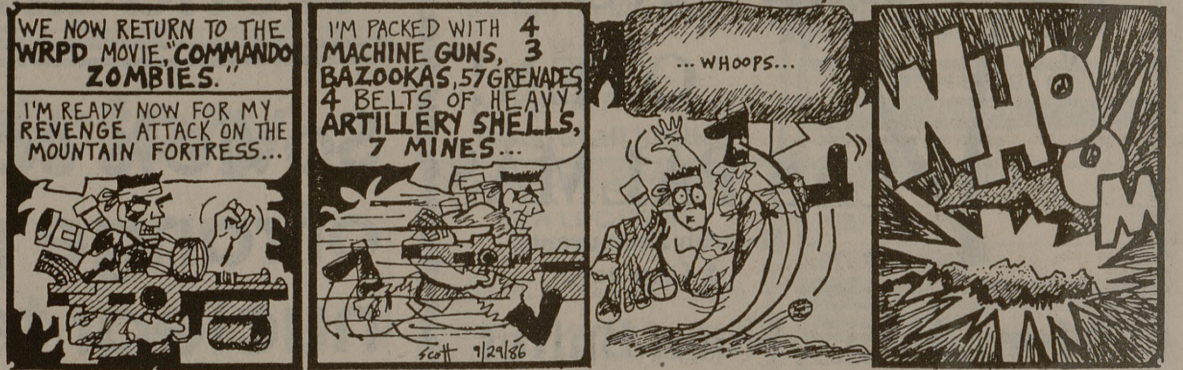
However, Nation said, the investigators concluded that excessive alcohol intake resulted in a breakdown of the intestinal walls, allowing lead to be absorbed easily into the system.

In other words, he said, the investigators concluded that high amounts of alcohol could lead to high amounts of lead in the body.

If both groups of researchers are correct, Nation said, a bad situation would be present because the effects of high lead levels and high alcohol consumption would form a vicious circle.

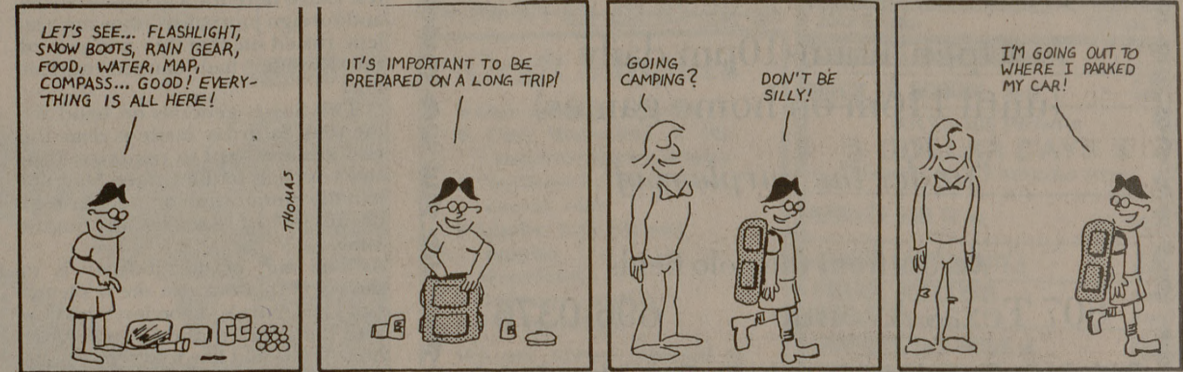
Warped

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House's tax increase bill reaches Senate

AUSTIN (AP) — As the House approved \$869.2 million tax increase plan reached the Senate on Sunday, Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby said the Legislature's budget-balancing special session could end by mid-week.

"I think it's a good bill," Hobby said following a five-minute meeting in which the Senate formally received the tax bill from the House.

The House passed the tax bill Saturday, along with \$582 million in spending cuts to help the state out of a \$2.8 billion budget deficit brought on by the oil price drop.

A majority of senators had resisted deeper spending cuts and

pushed for a tax hike since the Legislature's back-to-back special sessions began Aug. 6.

The temporary tax package would raise the sales tax from 4 1/2 percent to 5 1/4 percent, and add 5 cents to the 10-cent per-gallon gasoline tax.

Both would take effect Jan. 1 and expire Aug. 31.

The spending-cut bill would eliminate nearly 2,000 state jobs and wipe out a 3 percent state employee pay raise scheduled for 1987.

Also approved by the House was a provision to allow counties and cities not now collecting a transit tax to

add a half-penny to their local sales taxes.


At a session attended by only three senators, Hobby said the Senate Finance Committee would hold a hearing on the tax bill today.

Asked if he expected the special session that began Sept. 8 to wrap up Tuesday or Wednesday, he replied, "Something like that."

Hobby, who initially had sought a permanent tax increase to 5 cents to cure the state's money woes, said the temporary tax hike was the best this special session could do.

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