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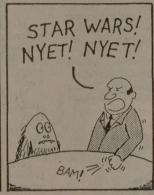




Waldo

by Kevin Thomas









A&M prof: Arsenic not as bad as deadly reputation implies

By Suna Purser Reporter

Many people may think of Agatha hristie mysteries or cloak and dager crimes when they hear the word

But Dr. Kurt Irgolic, a chemistry rofessor at Texas A&M, says arse-ic doesn't always deserve its bad ame; there is a historic reason for s deadly reputation.

"In medieval times, when there mpossible to prove death by poisonas no analytical chemistry, it was ng," Irgolic says. "If someone anted to dispose of a wealthy uncle, e purchased a vial of arsenic and ut it in the uncle's drink. He beame violently ill and then he died. was an accepted way of doing busi-

Arsenic poisoning may have killed apoleon Bonaparte, Irgolic says, ting the scholarly paper "Distribuon of Arsenic in Napoleon's Hair," ritten by Drs. Hamilton Smith, en Forshufvud and Anders Wasn, in which the scientists present sults of their preliminary work on is theory.

In the early 1900s, Paul Ehrlich, a erman doctor, began experimentg with various arsenic compounds, golic says. The 606th compound hrlich developed was Salvarsan, e first effective drug used to treat philis. Since then, thousands of aric compounds have been devel-

the environment, is found almost everywhere in low concentrations, depending on a region's geology, he says. It is usually associated with sulfide ore deposits, such as iron pyrite (fool's gold.)

When these sulfide deposits erode, arsenic is released into the environment — in an inorganic form — where it remains at a constant

"If someone wanted to dispose of a wealthy uncle, he purchased a vial of arsenic and put it in the uncle's drink.'

— Dr. Kurt Irgolic, A&M chemistry professor

level, depending on geological conditions, he says. Its toxicity depends on the compound it forms.

"It's (toxicity) a question of dose," Irgolic says. "Some forms of arsenic are more toxic than others and so only a small amount can have a deadly effect.'

Irgolic's work concentrates on arsenic's environmental impact, particularly on marine life. A non-toxic arsenic compound, arsenobetaine, has been identified in a variety of marine life, including shrimp, tuna,

crab, lobster and algae, he says.

Specimens used for study come from unpolluted waters from areas throughout the world, such as Australia, Chile, Alaska and Japan, he

"Some (specimens) have more or less of this non-toxic substance, depending on the region," Irgolic says. Average arsenic content is only a few milligrams per kilogram."

Arsenobetaine also can be made synthetically. Rats and mice have been fed varying doses with no adverse effects, and the same seems to be true of marine life, he says.

"We take it (arsenobetaine) up in the seafood we eat," Irgolic says. "But it is eliminated immediately by the bladder and poses absolutely no threat to people.

Finding the source of arsenobetaine is part of Irgolic's research. It may be a natural phenomenon substance some forms of marine life produce naturally, he says. It may also be produced at a low level, as in algae, or at a higher level, as in fish.

Irgolic stresses arsenobetaine's non-toxicity and says arsenic is an essential trace element, such as copper

or zinc.
"My own opinion, and one perhaps not everyone will agree with, is that arsenic is an essential element, and may play a significant part in some diseases associated with the elderly," he says

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The Judge Advocate General's School of the Army 1:30 p.m. John Fobes President, Economic Development Foundation "Economic and Social Development"

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