

# Mattox says insurance industry might fail like savings and loans

AUSTIN (AP) — Decrying "scoundrels" working for Texas insurance companies, Attorney General Jim Mattox said Monday the industry could go the way of failing banks and thrifts in the state.

"We may very well be seeing the same thing happen in the insurance industry that we've seen happen in the banking and savings and loan industry," Mattox said.

"But the problem that exists is, the insurance industry is not fully insured by the federal government, which can cause us major problems if we see these companies going down."

Mattox also said if State Board of Insurance members do not step up

their process for taking control of troubled insurance companies, "the call for their resignation may very well come within a relatively short period of time."

Mattox at a news conference described as "incestuous" the relationship between the board and insurance companies.

The Insurance Board responded with a statement calling Mattox's comments "unfortunate" and "regrettable."

"Texas clearly is not facing an insurance solvency crisis, and Mr. Mattox is not serving the public by suggesting that one is imminent," the statement said.

"It is easy for Mr. Mattox to make

criticisms based on inadequate knowledge of insurance regulation and the workings of the State Board of Insurance."

Insurance Board staff members responsible for solvency regulation have a fine reputation, according to the board's statement.

The 41 Texas domestic insurance companies in receivership represent 5 percent of the total of Texas-based insurance companies, the board said. It said that percentage compares "quite favorably" with such states as New York, California and Florida.

The board said it hopes an "early warning system" being developed by the board will make the percentage of Texas receiverships even smaller.

Mattox noted that National County Mutual Fire Insurance Co. — under a deficit of more than \$50 million — recently collapsed and was declared insolvent. He said that was not an isolated incident.

"We have seen the insurance industry be an industry that at times has attracted scoundrels," Mattox said. He said there are "a number of scoundrels" among the 75-125 potentially troubled companies the Insurance Board is monitoring.

He said his office had been waiting a month for insurance board approval to go to court against a trou-

bled company, Texas Insurance Co. of Houston, a major carrier of medical malpractice insurance, including coverage for blood banks.

"Just a glance at those public records should have been a red flag to regulators. But where was the state board? Totally in the dark," Mattox said.

He said the company, which was brought to his attention by Sen. Carlos Truan, D-Corpus Christi, "has ties to questionable insurers and its assets appear insufficient on the face of publicly available financial statements."

Foster Brewer, company board chairman, said, "We don't know what he (Mattox) is talking about. I think Mr. Mattox is a good attorney general and a good man. . . . I trust him but his information is not correct."

Brewer said liability insurance represented a small percentage of Texas Insurance's coverage, and if the insurance board had found anything wrong, it would have said, "Shut them down."

"We are in sound financial condition," he said.

The board said the company and the agency that writes most of its business are undergoing financial and market conduct examinations.

# Drug dogs get credit for border patrol busts

EL PASO (AP) — Drug-sniffing dogs are getting most of the credit for what promises to be a record-setting year in the U.S. Border Patrol's fight against narcotics traffickers.

Since the federal fiscal year began Oct. 1 — less than four months ago — the Border Patrol's El Paso sector has made almost half as many seizures as it made in all of fiscal 1988, which was a record year. So far this fiscal year, the El Paso sector has made 421 seizures of drugs valued at \$138 million.

This past weekend alone, Border Patrol agents seized 792 pounds of marijuana and 14 pounds of cocaine in 16 incidents in which 18 people were arrested, Gus De La Vina, Border Patrol chief deputy, said. Sniffer dogs detected most of the drugs and have been the reason for the boost in seizures in the last year, he said.

"It's been a real good program," De La Vina said. "We've been rocking the drug smugglers."

The dogs' accuracy and keen sense of smell can be amazing. One sniffer dog, Rex, helped agents find 84 pounds of marijuana his first day on the job. But

Rex can find much smaller amounts.

For example, Rex once alerted his handler, Ray Sanchez Jr., to a suitcase after other agents had opened it, searched and found no drugs.

"I told them to look again," Sanchez said. "They opened it, took out all the clothes and found one marijuana seed in the bottom."

Another time, Rex alerted Sanchez to a truck stopped at a checkpoint in south Texas. Sanchez asked agents to check for drugs between the truck cab and bed. A cursory look yielded nothing. But agents, trusting the Belgian malinois' nose, removed the bed and found marijuana welded into the frame.

"His sense of smell is amazing," Sanchez said. "I know now if something's there — no matter how it's hidden — he's going to get it."

Rex has found about 100 drug caches, Sanchez said. Before he got Rex, Sanchez had made only one bust in three years.

Rex and two other dogs began working for the Border Patrol's El Paso sector in December 1987, and now 14 dogs work the sector.

# Pilot's body honored upon its return home

DOVER AIR FORCE BASE, Del. (AP) — The body of a U.S. Air Force officer who was shot down over Libya in 1986 was returned Monday to the United States and honored with a brief ceremony.

Maj. Fernando Ribas-Dominicci, who was 33 at the time of his death, was killed in the 1986 U.S. air raid on Tripoli. He was a captain at the time and was promoted to major posthumously.

The body arrived at Dover Air Force Base shortly after 2 p.m. on a C-141 Starlifter from Torrejon Air Base in Spain.

The plane was met by Ribas-Dominicci's family and an Air Force honor guard, pallbearers and color guard.

The family was proud of what "Paul and Fernando and the rest of the guys were doing in the defense of democracy, freedom and the good things that our country stands for," said his brother, Salvador Ribas-Dominicci, 37, of Mayaguez, Puerto Rico.

He was referring to Capt. Paul Lorence of San Francisco, who was in the F-111 bomber with Ribas-Dominicci when it was shot down.

Libya had said the body it released and flew to Rome on Friday belonged to Lorence. An autopsy, however, showed it was Ribas-Dominicci.

Salvador Ribas-Dominicci said he was angry because the body should

have been identified and returned immediately after the plane was shot down.

"Military people are supposed to live by codes of honor . . . and obviously Gadhafi was trying to play something with this," he said.

He also said the return of his brother's body should not draw attention away from "chemical warfare plans in Libya."

"That has to finish. That has to be laid to rest. I don't know how they're going to do it. We will support our president and our nation in clearing the world of that danger," he said.

Also attending the ceremony were the major's wife, Blanca Berain Ribas-Dominicci, 36, and his 7-year-old son Fernando Jr., both of Austin, Texas; another brother, Jose Alfredo Ribas-Dominicci, 52, of San Juan, Puerto Rico; a nephew, Miguel Carlos Ribas-Dominicci, 23, and a niece, Nivea Rosario Ribas-Dominicci, 28, both of New York.

Salvador Ribas-Dominicci said the family would be briefed later Monday, and said he was confident the body at the base belonged to his brother.

He said burial would be in Puerto Rico.

The body will be prepared for burial at Dover Air Force Base which handles the bodies of servicemen and their dependents who die in Europe, the Azores, Greenland and Iceland.

# Doctor: Computers do not hurt eyes

By Stephanie Stribling  
Reporter

As more people are initiated into the growing society of computer literates, an increasing concern has surfaced concerning the computer's effect on eyesight. Can the extended use of video display terminals permanently damage user's vision?

"No," Dr. Barry Glenn, a Bryan ophthalmologist, said. "It may cause discomfort, like eyestrain."

According to an article by industrial hygienist John A. Pendergrass in National Safety and Health News, studies have failed to confirm positive evidence to support the theory that radiation emitted from video display terminals can permanently damage the human eye. Pendergrass compared radiation levels emitted by computers with those of other devices.

"Compared with diagnostic medical equipment, TV sets, FM radio waves, and even the natural environment, the level of radiation emitted by VDTs is scant," Pendergrass said.

Although computer users often complain of burning, tired, strained eyes, and blurred or double vision after long periods of work, Bryan

ophthalmologist Mark Lindsay said these are merely symptoms of muscle fatigue.

"It's like if you go out and run five miles," Lindsay said. "Your legs hurt like crazy."

Pendergrass said some studies have shown many computer users experience discomfort because their vision needs correction.

"It has been estimated that about 30 percent of the population has some uncorrected eye disorder," Pendergrass said.

Glenn adds that the need for glasses does not result from computer use.

"Working at the computer won't cause you to have to wear glasses," Glenn said. "The eyes may change, and you might be more comfortable wearing glasses, but that is an eye change that would most likely have occurred independent of the computer. It may have been a natural progression of the eyes anyway."

For those computer users who experience visual discomfort, Glenn said prescription glasses are the answer for only a few people.

"A little bit of correction for some people makes a difference," he said. "Some people can't tell a difference."

For those who cannot be helped by corrective

lenses, Pendergrass said other alternatives are available for easing eyestrain, the best of which is taking a short break periodically.

"Eyestrain is almost always relieved by resting," Pendergrass said. "So breaks should be scheduled throughout the day."

He said computer screen glares also can cause problems.

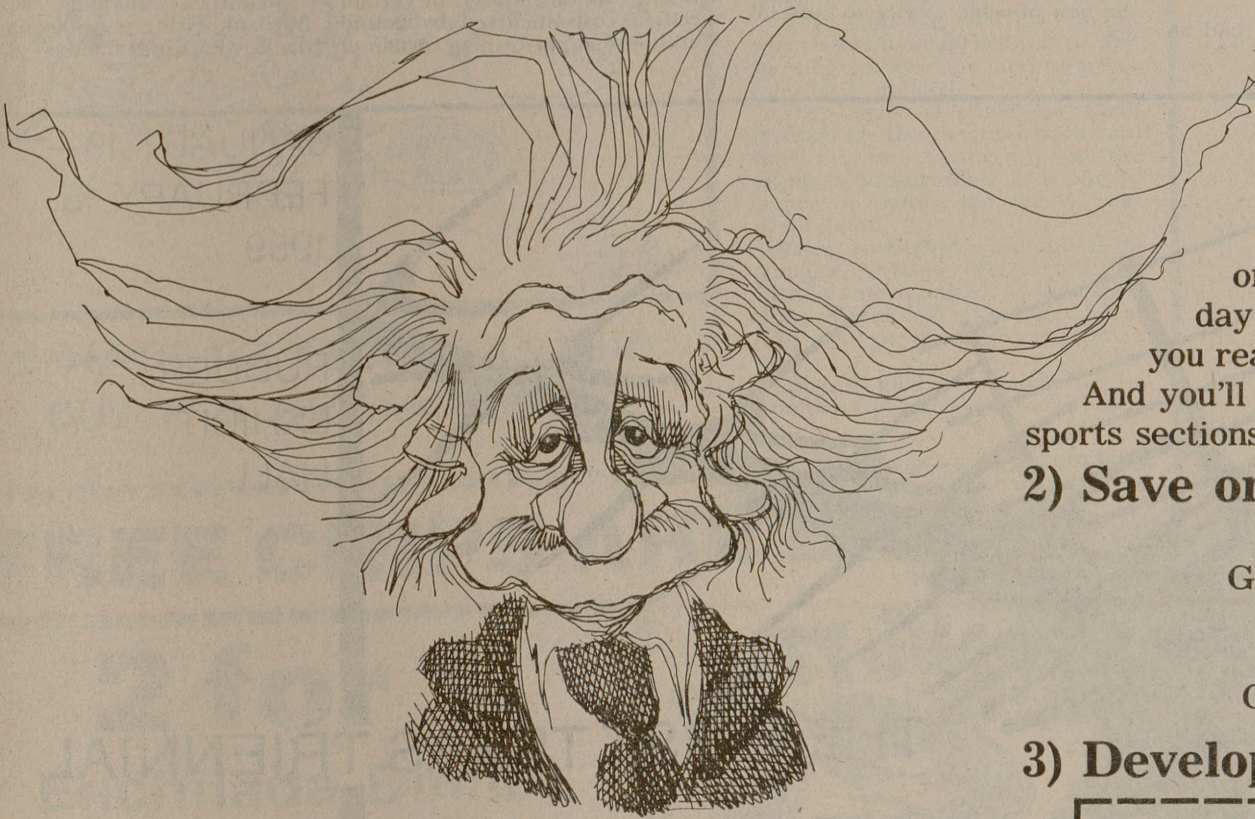
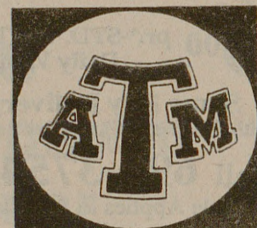
"The glare created by improper lighting or direct sunlight may cause eyestrain," Pendergrass said.

In "Computer Eye Stress" by M. Evans & Co., optometrist Anthony Hutchinson said glare can be eliminated by moving the terminal or placing a glare-proof filter over the screen. He said in addition to glare, reflections sometimes are the problem.

"If there's a reflection on your screen of a bookcase 15 feet behind you," Hutchinson writes, "you unconsciously refocus your eyes in proportion to the distance of the actual bookcase — and repeated back-and-forth jumps will lead to eyestrain."

He said this problem can be corrected by moving the terminal or changing its angle.

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