

The Purge of Leafy Spurge

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been discovered to date that would indicate that the plant is unsafe."

Spokesmen for the commission and PG & E say that it is uncertain when the license may be restored.

—*Marjorie Sun*

Koop Confirmed as Surgeon General

After 9 months of debate that has waxed and waned, C. Everett Koop was confirmed by the Senate as Surgeon General on 16 November. The Senate voted 68 to 24 to approve the Philadelphia pediatric surgeon.



C. Everett Koop

In the end, there was little doubt

Groups such as the National Organization for Women argued that Koop was unqualified for the country's top medical post because of his staunch antiabortion views and, in their opinion, his insensitivity to women's issues. The American Public Health Association and others opposed him because he has been primarily a clinician rather than an administrator in public health policy.

Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) defended Koop during floor debate, declaring that the physician had the requisite credentials and that his views on abortion and traditional roles for women should not affect his fitness as Surgeon General.

The Senate debated Koop's confirmation for an hour and there was little question that he would be approved.

Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary of Health Edward Brandt, Jr., was apparently successful in his efforts to assure many legislators that Koop would be subordinate to his policy decisions.

Last summer Congress enacted special legislation that waived the 64-year-old age limit on the surgeon general job. Koop is 65 and has served as a deputy assistant to Brandt since last spring.—*Marjorie Sun*

The Purge of Leafy Spurge

In what may rival the Southeast's battle against creeping kudzu, central and northern states are stepping up their campaign to purge themselves of leafy spurge.

The pesky perennial, *Euphorbia esula*, has now sunk its deep roots into more than 3 million acres of rangeland in at least six states and its growth is doubling every year. Last month, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) put up \$200,000 to study ways to arrest the weed's growth. The money will go to land-grant universities in Wyoming, Montana, and North Dakota.

The narrow-leaved plant, which grows 1 to 3 feet tall, cuts land productivity 40 to 70 percent and propagates easily in uncultivated land. For a variety of reasons, leafy spurge has been a dickens to control. Cultivation has proved to be an effective measure on cropland, but is an impractical and high-priced method of control on grazing land that has relative marginal worth to begin with. Herbicides are partially successful in killing the plant but chemical control is again too costly. Moreover, the herbicides usually only wither the top part of the plant. The root system of the tenacious plant penetrates 3 feet into the soil, successfully shielding itself from chemical warfare by ranchers.

Some researchers are scheming about ways to attack the roots. Others are testing methods of biological control with the use of a number of insects, including a species of moth. But insect control sometimes requires 15 to 20 years of testing before widespread use may be safely permitted,

according to Suzanne Batra, a USDA entomologist at Beneficial Insect Introduction Laboratory, located on Pesticide Road, Beltsville, Maryland.

In the best of all worlds, livestock



Poisonous Plants of the U.S. (Macmillan 1975)

Pesky Perennial

Covering 3 million acres and spreading

would find the weed tasty and nutritious but apparently animals are not impressed. In fact, cattle become quite indisposed if they lurch on leafy spurge. The side effects include dermatitis of the mouth and diarrhea. Leafy spurge researcher D. Stuart Frear at the USDA station in Fargo, North Dakota, says that sheep in Montana seem to have taken a liking for the weed although another USDA scientist, Warren C. Shaw, says the plant is probably toxic to sheep as well.

Frear says that seeds of the weed were reportedly transported here by European immigrants during the early 1800's. He says the seeds were perhaps inadvertently mixed with other seeds for crops or purposely imported because its yellow flowers were considered ornamental.

Some researchers are trying to discover if there is anything redeeming about the weed. Its stems contain a milky, latex liquid similar to that of milkweed and dandelions and a few scientists are looking for some beneficial use. But, Frear says, "Right now, leafy spurge is just a weed and a problem."—*Marjorie Sun*