

Labels—An Ounce of Prevention

CERTAINLY there is no area of industry in which a greater percentage of the people must be concerned with careful labeling than that area concerned with agricultural and food chemistry. The extent of this concern with labels is increasing constantly as new types of products appear on the market and new laws and regulations are put on the books.

Public recognition of the need for an adequate labeling program for hazardous chemical products first came in 1932 when Senator Hiram Bingham of Connecticut introduced into Congress an act calling for the labeling of certain chemical products. Prior to that time, there were officially in existence only the Federal Caustic Poisons Act and the regulations of the Interstate Commerce Commission, both of which were concerned with labeling within narrow limits. Bingham's bill aroused the chemical industry to action and a committee met with the Surgeon General of the U. S. Public Health Service to consider the matter. Voluntary methods were agreed to be preferable to a federal act and a permanent committee worked out a series of agreements between manufacturers of six chemical product groups and the Surgeon General. By this agreement, manufacturers voluntarily affixed warning labels to all shipments.

In 1944, the Manufacturing Chemists' Association took steps to organize a permanent committee to study labeling. The Labels and Precautionary Information Committee was formed with legal, medical, research, operating, and sales representatives of chemical companies.

The LAPI Committee developed a guide for the preparation of warning labels for hazardous chemicals which was published by the MCA in 1945. It met with almost universal acceptance. The LAPI Committee worked in cooperation with state authorities and has been quite effective in encouraging the development of regulations which correspond closely with its system.

Special attention has been given to encouragement of uniformity among the laws of our states. This is a very important matter and all reasonable effort should be put forth by all concerned to encourage such uniformity. The industrial strength of the United States owes much to the vast market unfettered by interstate tariffs and relatively unhampered by serious differences in regulations from one state to another. If an agricultural chemical, for example, properly packed and labeled for use in one state encounters legal trouble in another, the results may deprive many people of the benefits of our research and industrial progress.



WALTER J. MURPHY, Editor

The success of the chemical industry's voluntary attention to precautionary labels is attested by the fact that the Surgeon General recently has decided to discontinue the old labeling agreements because adequate labels are in general use today.

The third revision of the LAPI guide now has appeared (see page 360). Not only does it give discussion of general principles and special suggestions for a number of types of products, but a section is devoted to illustrative warning labels for those products legally termed economic poisons. Most of the suggested labels present information beyond that required by federal statutes and are intended for use in addition to or in combination with any labels required by law.

The MCA is to be congratulated on the effectiveness of its work and complimented for putting so much effort and attention into this important matter. Producers of chemical products, which may, in any way, be considered hazardous, are urged to make use of this guide.

Direct Communication is Irreplaceable

IN THE PAST we have commented on these pages to the effect that a fine job is being done in research in agricultural and food chemistry, but the results of good research are of concrete value only when put to use. What are the effective channels? It is our opinion that the publication of research results is a basic step and it is our policy to publish, as promptly as possible, careful reports of new work. By supplementing this with news of technical and economic developments, an integrated picture of the interrelated progress in the several fields within the area of agricultural and food chemistry is presented. But there is no substitute for personal contact and no other place where the opportunities are so concentrated as at the meetings of scientific and technical societies and trade associations. In mid-June the American Plant Food Council and the National Fertilizer Association meetings will provide an occasion the like of which comes only once a year for men in those fields to meet and talk personally with their colleagues and to develop a rounded picture of the status of progress, needs, conditions, and opportunities in their spheres of interest.