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Should we tamper with weather?

Today's Consumer Mailbag question is being answered by John Sobelzer, attorney and executive director of East Michigan Environmental Action Council.

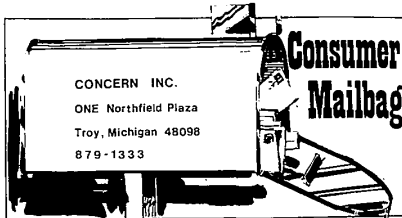
Questions on consumer and environmental issues should be sent to Concern Inc. Detroit, 1 Northfield Plaza, Troy 48068.

The weather has been so lousy. Have we made any gains in controlling it?
A.B. Troy

Mark Twain is reputed to have said, "Everybody always talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it."

We are still talking about the weather. These days, however, nobody is somebody and there is enough being done about the weather to make one sit up and take notice.

Did you know that in 1974 five per cent of the United States and Puerto Rico land surface was affected by



weather modification activities? In fact, 55 per cent of South Dakota, 32 per cent of North Dakota, and 50 per cent of Utah were affected.

Did you know that the disastrous 1972 Rapid City flood, which killed nearly 240 people, was caused by a storm whose clouds had been seeded a few hours earlier?

Learn to read, listen

Courses to improve listening, rapid reading with comprehension, and memory skills are among the evening non-degree communication courses to be offered by the Oakland University Division of Continuing Education beginning the week of Jan. 23.

Rapid Reading with Comprehension, which provides practice in reading different types of materials, is scheduled for 10 weeks from 7:30-10 p.m., Mondays, beginning Jan. 23.

The Art of Listening will present an understanding of defensive listening and provide practice sessions for eight weeks from 7:30-10 p.m., Tuesdays, beginning Jan. 24.

The self-help course Memory Power, based on principles of remembering derived from sound research, will be discussed and practiced from 8-10 p.m., Wednesdays, beginning Jan. 25.

Other communication courses to be offered include Introduction to Transactional Analysis (TA) with Gestalt

Experiments on Monday evenings and Assertiveness Training on Thursday evenings.

For course and registration information, call the Continuing Education office, 377-3129.

Big government

One major factor in the steep rise of property taxes is this: Nearly 50 per cent more people are employed by local governments today than there were a decade ago.

There are many more examples of adverse weather modification in the United States. Much of it has gone relatively unnoticed, while others have created a storm of controversy.

PART OF THE controversy has been over the issue of whether weather modification really works. The large variability in natural weather patterns has so far made it impossible to prove cause and effect in court or in the scientific community.

Why engage in weather modification? Suppose a farmer could increase his gross return by several dollars per acre if his rainfall increased by 10 per cent. If it costs only five cents an acre it might be worth the risk. Hydroelectric utilities and municipalities that need more water, ski resorts that need more snow, farmers who fear hailstorms, and others may decide that weather modification would be profitable.

There are many others who oppose weather modification for environmental, economic, and religious reasons. Because our knowledge about the weather is so meager, any attempt at modification could lead to adverse impacts. The Rapid City flood is sus-

pected (but not proved to be) as being one of those. It exemplifies the danger inherent in many weather modification schemes.

The stickiest issues, however, are highlighted by the known impacts of weather modification. Some farmers and recreational interests may be injured by increased precipitation. Increased rain and snow can disrupt everyday activities, especially during large storms, and cause flooding. Causing precipitation in one area may affect it down wind.

ASK YOURSELF if you want to decide whose weather is to be improved, whose is to be sacrificed, and whose is to be maintained. Once that is done, figure out a way to decide who had their rights infringed upon and whether they should be compensated.

There is also the danger that a continuous program may have the same impact as a change in the climate. Plant and animal life must change to reflect those modified conditions. Any significant change, therefore, could have substantial ecological impacts which would then affect farming, forestry, and other human activities.

In short, we must be careful that we don't permit weather modification to become a "technological fix" for our social and environmental problems. We should adapt our number and our activities to the weather instead of relying on man-made changes to sustain those that would otherwise fail. In that way we avoid the disasters that accompany the failure of technological fix. We also assure that we will not suffer from inadvertent but harmful impacts on our environment and society.

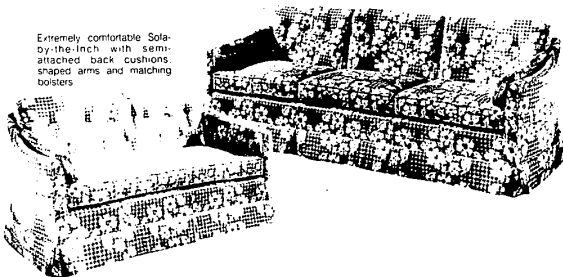
If you want further information on this subject, you may contact our office at ENRAC, 1 Northfield Plaza, Troy 48068.

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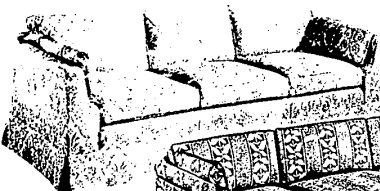
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