

VDTs—computer health hazard

by Tricia Goldberg

When you sit down at your computer terminal, are you endangering your health? That question is still unanswered, even after years of research.

Over the past decade, research has implicated video display terminals (VDTs) in health problems such as cancer, miscarriages, eye problems, nerve ailments and carpal tunnel syndrome.

"Unexplained clusters of miscarriages and birth defects have been reported—from the seven out of 13 pregnant Air Canada check-in clerks who miscarried over the course of two years, to the eight out of 12 pregnant Sears finance secretaries who miscarried within fourteen months. Yet the government has steadfastly refused to issue any recommendations or regulations for VDT use," *Glamour's* February 1991 issue said.

A study performed by the Kaiser Permanente Medical Care Program in Oakland, Calif. found that women who worked on VDTs for more than 20 hours per week had an 80 percent increased risk

of miscarriage.

"This is frightening news for those of us who work 40 hours or more," said *Glamour's* Cindi Leive.

In May 1990, the EPA released a draft report on low-frequency electromagnetic fields (like those from VDTs). Though it did not consider reproductive hazards, it did reach a dramatic conclusion: that the fields should be designated "probable human carcinogens," the second-highest toxin ranking possible.

Dr. John Minor, chair of the Computer Science Department at UNLV, said, "I don't know (if VDTs are dangerous). It's more of a physics problem. As far as radiation, I don't know how much they give off. It's probably better to ask the Physics Department." He said that personally he doesn't worry about radiation from VDTs.

To date, government and industry have basically ignored this potential problem. Although our federal government has taken no stand on this issue, the Human Factors Society has issued voluntary standards for the design of VDT workstations, and the National Institute for Occupational

Safety and Health has provided ergonomic guidelines for VDT use. Some businesses, such as newspapers and airlines, that employ huge numbers of VDT operators are beginning to redesign the VDT work environment—with indirect lighting and ergonomic chairs.

The government of San Francisco this year passed an ordinance on VDT safety that requires employers to provide workers with height-adjustable monitors, glare screens, detachable keyboards and 15-minute breaks every two hours. New York City, however, had its VDT safety bill vetoed by Mayor Ed Koch in one of his last official acts of office.

Average VDT users can help increase their own safety in the workplace by doing some simple things, said *Current Health's* December 1990 issue.

1. Sit at arm's length from terminals
2. Turn monitor off when not in use
3. Sit four feet from laser printers
4. Take regular breaks

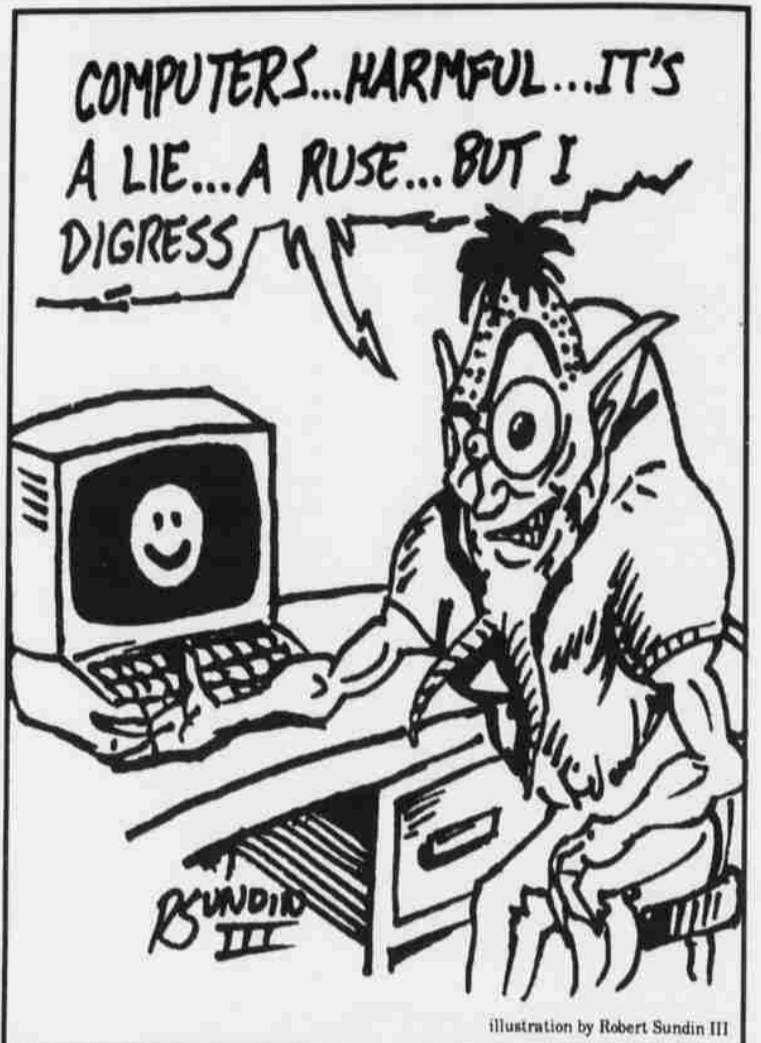


illustration by Robert Sundin III



The "Condom Bust Tester": The machines seem to have replaced beer company displays.

Condom demos replace beer company displays

(CPS)—Condom displays, it seems, have replaced beer company displays at Daytona Beach, Fla.

"We really want to find out who uses our product," said Barry Miller, vice president of marketing for Schmid Laboratories, a U.S. condom manufacturer that has a display at the Daytona 1991 Expo America.

At the Expo, companies that have products or magazines they want to sell to students pay to display their wares and sometimes give away samples.

These displays were most effective during spring break.

"College spring break offers us an advantage" in marketing to college students, added Miller, whose company's exhibit includes a computer game about AIDS and a "condom burst tester" which blows up condoms until they burst.

"Studies have shown that people between the ages of 18 and 24 have sex most frequently in part because they have more free

time than the general population," Miller said.

Moreover, this group has had the highest condom usage because they are for the most part educated about birth control and sexually transmitted diseases, he said.

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Meanwhile beer company displays, which in the past have included huge beer-bottle shaped balloons and scantily dressed young women handing out souvenirs, have been absent from the

party this year.

Under increasing threat of federal regulation, beer companies decided they would not "be represented in Spring Break activities" this year, said Lon Anderson of the Beer Institute, a brewery industry lobbying group in Washington, D.C.

In early March, U.S. Surgeon General Antonio Novello criticized beer companies for trying to sell alcohol to underage students.

Along the same lines, Drew, Tulane and Ohio State universities, Goucher College and the Georgia Institute of Technology all sponsored programs before Spring Break to warn students of the dangers of alcohol and sexually transmitted diseases.

"Students know the facts about AIDS and STDs and alcohol-related date rape, but they don't relate the facts to themselves," said Kathleen Nottage, head of health services at Drew. "That's what I do."

In the Spotlight



John H. DeLisle

John H. DeLisle is a fine arts senior and member of the UNLV Art Club. This photo is entitled "Happy Anniversary (Carnival March 8, 1990)." DeLisle dedicates this work to Gustavo, Cathey, Inigo, Vincent, Sam, Natalie, Pearl, Jasmine, Alfonzo, Patty, Mio, and Marcelo. It deals with the idea of commemorating certain high-

lights in one's life. "It captures the vibrancy of the moment," DeLisle said. "Although it is depicted in a sad way, the carnival comes and goes, and so does the moment."

"What existed in a previous time, the friendship, love, and excitement is soon forgotten," DeLisle added.

Proposal for four new food groups

A nutrition watchdog group suggests changing the Agriculture Department's four food groups (meat, dairy, grains and fruits/vegetables) to eliminate foods that are excessive in fat or protein.



Grains: Bread, pasta, hot or cold cereal, corn, millet, barley; grains are rich in fiber and other complex carbohydrates, as well as protein, B vitamins and zinc



Vegetables: Provide essential nutrients, including vitamin C, beta-carotene, riboflavin, iron, calcium, fiber; dark green, leafy vegetables providing such nutrients include broccoli, collards, kale, mustard, turnip greens; those providing beta-carotene include carrots, winter squash, sweet potatoes, pumpkin



Legumes: Beans, peas, lentils; good for fiber, protein, iron calcium, zinc and B vitamins; group also includes chickpeas, baked and refried beans, soy milk, tofu, tempeh and texturized vegetable protein



Fruits: Rich in fiber, vitamin C, beta-carotene; fruits high in vitamin C include citrus fruits, melons, strawberries; choose whole fruit over fruit juices, which don't contain as much healthy fiber