

COCKROACH DELIGHT

Farmers in the South are elated. A flying cockroach from Asia has shown a liking for the pesky bollworm that threatens cotton, soybean, corn and tomato crops. The roach also eats the eggs of the beet armyworm, a connoisseur of cotton, cabbage and other crops. The Asian cockroach first appeared in Florida in 1986, then migrated through Georgia, Alabama and up the East Coast. It first appeared in Texas in 2006. Bob Pfannenstiel, an entomologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has counted up to 100 roaches per square meter in soybean fields in Texas, and none damaged the plants. “It was truly a spectacle. It was unbelievable, and I’m sure they were feeding on more than eggs,” he told the Associated Press.

IDENTIFY YOURSELF

Kentucky Representative Tim Couch wants to cut down on online bullying by making anonymous online posting illegal. His bill would require anyone who contributes to a website to register their real name, address and email with that site. Website operators who allow anyone to post anonymously would be fined \$500 for a first offense and \$1,000 for each offense after that. The lawmaker admits that enforcement will be a challenge.

LIGHTS ON!

Nebraska has repealed its ban on driving with your lights on during the day. The law had outlived its usefulness, says Senator Rich Pahl. The law dates back to a time when people were supposed to turn their parking lights on only if they pulled off to the side of the road. But today many cars come with running lights that turn on when the car is started. Studies have shown that daytime lights can reduce accidents, although they do require a small amount more gas.

TEENAGE TROUBLE

A quarter of all teenage girls are infected with at least one sexually transmitted disease, according to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Nearly half the African-Americans and 20 percent of the whites in the study of girls between the ages of 14 and 19 were infected with human papillomavirus (HPV), chlamydia, genital herpes or trichomoniasis, a common parasite. Each disease can be serious. Officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the findings show the need to improve screening, vaccination and other prevention measures.

TESTY SENIORS

Eleven states are volunteering their high school seniors for the 12th grade version of the National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading and math. It’s a move that could lay the foundation for greater state participation in that test at that grade level, according to *Education Week*. Currently, states are required to participate in the national assessment of reading and math every two years in order to remain eligible for federal funding under the No Child Left Behind Act. These assessments get widespread attention because they allow comparisons across states.

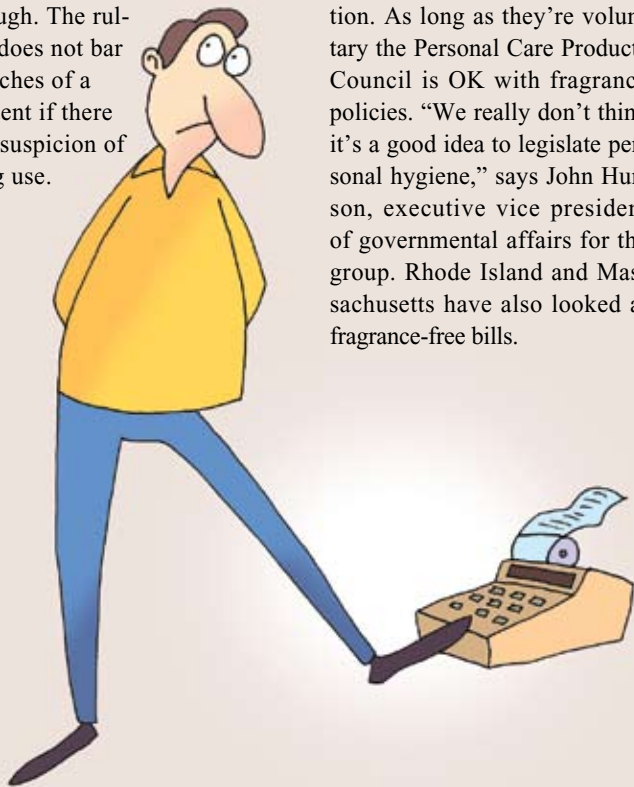


SICK AT WORK

At least 12 states have considered sick pay legislation this year. Nearly half of all U.S. workers—59 million—don’t have paid sick leave, making them choose between staying home and losing wages or working sick and exposing others. Advocates say making paid sick days a basic labor standard would follow most other developed countries and keep ill employees from contaminating the public and sick children out of classrooms. But companies argue that such requirements would drive up costs, force layoffs or reduce wages, and put some companies out of business.

NO TO DRUG TESTING

The Washington state Supreme Court recently ruled that random drug testing of student athletes is not allowed under the state constitution. A school district there began the policy during a time of great concern that substance abuse was the No. 1 problem among students, especially among athletes. Students were required to undergo urine tests if they wanted to participate in sports. The district has tested about 500 students over the past two years and about 10 have tested positive for drugs or alcohol. The court ruled that allowing drug testing of a student when there's no reason to suspect he is using drugs is not reason enough. The ruling does not bar searches of a student if there is a suspicion of drug use.



DOLLAR SENSELESS

Almost nobody who responded to a recent survey could explain the ramifications of paying off a debt in monthly installments vs. a lump sum. Only 35 percent understood how compound interest is calculated. Eleven percent didn't know whether they carry too much debt. The survey, by financial research provider TNS, Dartmouth College economists and the Harvard Business School, interviewed 1,000 adult Americans.

SMELLY OFFENSE

A Minnesota lawmaker, Representative Karen Clark, wants an educational campaign in schools on how perfumes and colognes can aggravate students with asthma and other health problems. "You can smell it from 10 feet away," Mikolai Altenberg, a senior at South High School in Minneapolis told the Associated Press. "Mostly it's just guys who just think that putting Axe [a popular teenage cologne] all over them is a substitute for showering." Clark scaled back on her original idea of banning fragrances in Minneapolis schools. The educational campaign could include letters to parents, fact sheets, signs in schools, email advisories and website information. As long as they're voluntary the Personal Care Products Council is OK with fragrance policies. "We really don't think it's a good idea to legislate personal hygiene," says John Hurson, executive vice president of governmental affairs for the group. Rhode Island and Massachusetts have also looked at fragrance-free bills.



HOME FOR A BOOK

Homeless men in Cleveland are reading books and opening up about their health and histories. Donna Kelly, an outreach nurse, began a book club last fall after noticing how many homeless men brought books to the health clinic she helped run in the shelter's cafeteria. She found that the men are more open to counseling and more likely to talk about health-related topics when it relates to the experience of a character in a book they love. "Sometimes health care isn't just about passing out pills," Kelly told *The Christian Science Monitor*. "It's about having a continuing relationship with my patients."

A FEAR OF PHOSPHATES

Virginia has joined a handful of states that have banned phosphates from all home dishwasher detergents. The ban will not take effect until 2010, however, to give detergent companies time to develop alternatives. Phosphates encourage the growth of algae, which clouds the water and depletes the oxygen that underwater plants and animals need to survive. Phosphates are among the most damaging pollutants in the Chesapeake Bay. The issue was brought before the legislature by an eighth grader who learned of the dangers from a science project. She contacted her representative, Kenneth Plum, who introduced the bill.

SALT OVERDOSE

Last winter's heavy snowfall and cold temperatures required record amounts of salt on roads, causing water quality concerns. In Wisconsin, the Department of Transportation estimates that a record 700,000 tons of salt was used on state highways, compared with 405,00 tons during the 2006-2007 winter. All that road salt washes into urban streams at levels that can kill aquatic life. Streams and rivers in the Lake Michigan watershed eventually flow into the lake, where salinity has increased more than a third since 1983. "This is really a dilemma," says Roger Bannerman with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, "because we want to keep our roads safe."