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Science Briefs - July 13

Compiled by Camera Staff Writer Laura Snider
Friday, July 13, 2007

Pollution

Haze formed by invisible gases

The primary cause of organic haze is not particulates — tiny particles like soot — spewed into the air. Instead, invisible, reactive gases cause the bulk of the haze, according to a University of Colorado study.

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The reactive gases studied, including volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, surface ozone, nitrogen compounds and sulfur dioxide, make up two-thirds of the organic haze in urban areas and up to 90 percent of the organic haze in rural areas, according to the study published last week in the online issue of Geophysical Research Letters.

CU researcher Jose-Luis Jimenez says that's because the reactive gases decrease very little as they're blown away from urban areas, unlike particulates.

"One question is whether we could improve air quality if we directly targeted VOC emissions and not just particle emissions," said Qi Zhang, a former scientist at CU's Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences and co-author of the study.

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Health

Pumpkins help cure diabetes

Diabetics who rely on insulin may be able to reduce their daily insulin injections with the help of pumpkin extract.

Researchers in China recently found that pumpkin extract promoted regeneration of damaged pancreatic cells, which produce insulin, in diabetic rats.

"Pumpkin extract is potentially a very good product for pre-diabetic persons, as well as those who have already developed diabetes," said lead researcher Tao Xia.

It's impossible to tell for sure that the extract would promote pancreatic cell regeneration in humans, and even if it did, the extract probably would not eliminate insulin injections, but it could reduce the number needed each day.

Nutrition

Cane sugar same as corn syrup

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Movie Times & Movie Reviews

Cane sugar and corn syrup have similar effects on hunger, fullness and the amount of food eaten at lunch, according to a study published this month in the July issue of the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

In past studies, high-fructose corn syrup had been linked to obesity in animal-based studies, and cane sugar — or sucrose — has been assumed to be better for you.

"Some companies have made a sincere effort to put sucrose back in soda," said study author Adam Drewnowski. "But there is no direct link between the type of sweetener and obesity. As far as appetite is concerned, cane and corn sugars in beverages are much the same."

Researchers gave the study subjects a beverage at mid-morning, tracked their hunger and appetite for two hours, and then provided lunch.

Economics

Emigration of unskilled workers increases child labor

Unskilled adult laborers moving out of poor countries to work in rich countries increases the incidence of child labor, according to a study appearing this month in the Journal of Labor Economics.

The study also found that child-wage subsidies, such as subsidized meals, increases the incidence of child labor by lowering the costs of child labor to employees.

According to the International Labor Organization, about 15 percent of children worldwide between the ages of 5 and 14 are classified as child laborers. Of these working children, about 171 million work in hazardous conditions and 5.7 million are forced to work against their will.

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