

products as resources. These wastes can be turned into useful products by research. He cited the example of molasses which was considered in the past as a waste but today is a valuable resource material for production of alcohol. He urged industries to adopt a strategy and aim of attaining zero pollution by converting

waste into useful by-products.

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## NEWS

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### THE VALUE OF IMPERFECT INFORMATION

. . . "George M. Humphrey, the former Secretary of the Treasury, is quoted as saying, 'There are no hard decisions, just insufficient facts. When you have facts, the decisions come easy.' When confronted with the need to decide in situations where the consequences cannot be precisely predicted, most people want more or better information before acting. There are costs associated with gathering facts, or additional information. They may be in the form of staff effort diverted from other activities, cash outlays for expert assistance, or opportunities foregone while information is collected and analyzed. Regardless of the cost to collect, only rarely will unequivocally 'perfect' information be obtained. It is desirable, therefore, to know

what effect additional information (we already know it will also be more or less ambiguous or 'imperfect') will have on the outcome of the decision, and how to extract maximum utility from whatever information is currently available. Ironically, in most situations there is usually a considerable amount of information available that is not fully exploited prior to reaching a decision."

[(S. Michael Malinconico (New York Public Library) in *Library Journal* 110(4):63-5, 1 Mar 85). Reproduced with permission from Press Digest, *Current Contents*®, No. 17, April 29, 1985, p. 7 (Published by the Institute for Scientific Information®, Philadelphia, PA, USA.)]

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### THE SNOW THAT KILLS

. . . "While snow is beautiful, it can also kill. Those white streaks [on a mountainside] are avalanche trails. Already this year 26 people have died in avalanches in the Swiss Alps. The worst year recently was 1951, when 98 people perished, most of them when tons of snow crashed down the slopes and inundated their villages in the valley below. 'We have been able to decrease the danger by a factor of 10, but there is still an awful lot we don't know about snow,' says Claude Jaccard [Swiss-Federal Inst. for Snow & Avalanche Research]. There is a lot of room inside a snowpile, which is three-quarters air and one-quarter ice. All of the freezing, melting and changing shapes lead to instability, movement and avalanches. . . . Jaccard and his staff of 31, perched [in Weissfluhjoch], 8,737 feet above sea level, measure snow's water content.

Using remote microphones, they listen to snowdrifts for sounds that indicate that the underlying snow may be ready to shift. They also slice snow blocks into thin sections and analyze the blocks' structure on a computer. They throw snow down a little chute to simulate little avalanches. They design and test fences to stop the snow. And some 60 volunteers, including a priest in the hospice at Grand St. Bernard, telex in reports on conditions every morning, which are assembled into avalanche warnings."

[(Philip Revzin in *Wall Street Journal* 6 Mar 85, p. 1, 28). Reproduced with permission from Press Digest, *Current Contents*®, No. 16, April 22, 1985, p. 12 (Published by the Institute for Scientific Information®, Philadelphia, PA, USA.)]