

National and Washington news in brief

San Jose Mercury News (California)

October 19, 2005 Wednesday MO1 EDITION

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Section: A; BRIEF; Pg. 7

Length: 664 words

Body

WASHINGTON, D.C.

White House abandons plan to loosen policies in parks

The Bush administration has backed away from the most controversial parts of a proposed revision of **National** Park Service policy that critics said would have opened the park system to more commercial activity and off-road vehicle use.

Draft management policies released Tuesday by the Department of Interior no longer contained proposals by a political appointee that had caused a furor in the park service when they were leaked in August.

The new proposal omits language that park advocates said would have undercut a strict, historic standard for conserving parks and protecting them from activities that would have impaired the park experience. It also drops sections that would have allowed snowmobiles on all paved park roads and weakened requirements to maintain a dark night sky or preserve quiet to enhance a natural experience.

Anti-bacterial products getting a hard look from FDA

It seems hard to go wrong with a hand soap that "kills 99 percent of germs" it encounters. But critics of anti-bacterial soaps in the home say there is plenty to be concerned about.

A government advisory panel will take a look at concerns Thursday.

Some people contend that a number of anti-bacterial products, particularly those that use synthetic chemicals rather than alcohol or bleach, pose the risk of creating germs that are resistant to anti-bacterials as well as antibiotics.

The Food and Drug Administration, in briefing documents posted on the Internet, said the agency had not found any medical studies that definitively linked specific anti-bacterial products to reduced infection rates.

Dalai Lama's planned speech riles neurology researchers

The Dalai Lama, revered as a spiritual leader, is at the center of a scientific controversy.

The exiled leader of Tibet has been a collaborator in research on whether the intense meditation practiced by Buddhist monks can train the brain to generate compassion and positive thoughts. He is scheduled to speak about the research next month in Washington, at the annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience.

But 544 brain researchers have signed a petition urging the society to cancel the lecture, because, according to the petition, "it will highlight a subject with largely unsubstantiated claims and compromised scientific rigor and objectivity."

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Defenders of the Dalai Lama's appearance say the motivation of many protesters is political: Many are Chinese or of Chinese descent. The Dalai Lama fled Tibet in 1959 after the Chinese crushed a Tibetan bid for independence.

ILLINOIS

Short car trips near home are often deadly for children

Eighty percent of car crashes involving children occur within 20 minutes of home, many during short drives to school or the grocery store in which parents fail to use child safety seats, according to a new report.

Vehicle crashes killed nearly 2,000 U.S. children and injured more than 250,000 in 2003.

More than half of crashes involving children are at speeds under 45 mph, and nearly half occur on local roads or in parking lots, according to the first Partners for Child Passenger Safety Fact and Trend Report, based on information from nearly 380,000 State Farm policyholders involved in accidents since 1997.

In other news

The members of the Sept. 11 commission will sharply criticize the Bush administration and Congress on Thursday in a new, privately financed report expected to single out the FBI as having failed to act on many of the panel's recommendations to protect the nation from terrorist attack, members of the bipartisan panel and its staff said.

Senators voted 92-6 on Tuesday to forgo a \$3,100 pay raise to their \$162,100 salaries next year in a symbolic show of resolve to spread the pain of financing at least some of the cost of reconstructing the hurricane-stricken Gulf Coast.

From Mercury News wire services

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (90%); BACTERIA (90%); CHILDREN (89%); NEUROSCIENCE (88%); PARKS & PLAYGROUNDS (78%); PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENTS (78%); **NATIONAL** PARKS (78%); TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS (77%); MOTOR VEHICLE SAFETY EQUIPMENT (77%); CHILD CAR SEATS (77%); CHILD SAFETY (75%); INFECTIOUS DISEASE (74%); TALKS & MEETINGS (71%); RESEARCH REPORTS (70%); BUDDHISTS & BUDDHISM (68%); BRAIN (68%); MEDITATION (66%); PETITIONS (65%); RELIGION (62%); CLERGY & RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS (50%)

Organization: **NATIONAL** PARK SERVICE (84%); **NATIONAL** PARK SERVICE (84%); FOOD & DRUG ADMINISTRATION (83%); FOOD & DRUG ADMINISTRATION (83%)

Industry: ANTI-INFECTIVES (90%); ANTIBIOTICS (90%); PARKS & PLAYGROUNDS (78%); **NATIONAL** PARKS (78%); TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS (77%); MOTOR VEHICLES (77%); MOTOR VEHICLE SAFETY EQUIPMENT (77%); CHILD CAR SEATS (77%); TOILET SOAPS (73%)

Person: DALAI LAMA (89%)

Geographic: SOUTHWEST CHINA (92%); DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, USA (79%); TIBET (93%); UNITED STATES (93%)

Load-Date: October 19, 2005

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