

Use of Scare Words Sometimes Costly

SODIUM NITRITE has been taken off the list of "scare words" because officials have found that particular food preservative isn't a health hazard. It doesn't impose undue risk of cancer, as had been indicated by a scientist from MIT and his herd of laboratory rats.

The mistake cost hog producers millions of dollars. Prices of live hogs fell as many consumers stopped eating pork products.

This wasn't the first time we have been panicked by false alarms and it probably won't be the last. Only those past middle age will recall the 1938 simulated radio newscast that earth had been invaded by men from Mars, but there have been quite a few others since that.

Some of these have come from government sources, based upon superficial or erroneous research results reported by scientists who may have been seeking publicity, more funds or prestige.

The big problem with scare words is sorting out those of real meaning from false or misleading terms.

A list of scare words in the area of

medicine and health compiled by author Mario Pei in a book last year included aerosol, cholesterol, cyclamates, carcinogen, allergy, hypertension, pollutant, radiation, additive, coloring and nitrite.

Part of those words may always have bad implications, but others have useful and harmless references in certain circumstances.

Words which scare some people may be music to the ears of others. If the boss says, "You're fired!" it might sound like the end of the world to most of us. To those who enjoy time off to spend unemployment pay, the same words could be as welcome.

People don't react to words like "communism" and "socialism" as strongly as they used to. However, "government ownership" and "free enterprise" still arouse considerable reaction, the direction depending upon which political philosophy the listener favors.

The same is true of "religion" and "atheism," with a wide range of related scare words in between. "Morality" may be a scare word to some

who fear its influence could interfere with their freewheeling lifestyles. "Immorality" might bother others.

Ecology, environment, pollution and endangered species may be scare words with varied effects. Drouth is a scare word to Oklahoma farmers, while "acid rain" has become a scare expression among residents of northeastern states.

The term inflation scares nearly everybody, but the mere thought of deflation may scare us even more. Politicians are aware of this, so they manipulate periodic recessions to stave off depression.

Unemployment is a scare word to workers who like to have regular incomes to provide their families with plenty of luxuries and a few necessities. But there seems to be a sizable minority who may have a considerable fear of just plain old "work."

To paraphrase an adage, "One man's scare word may be another man's motivation." Maybe we ought to find out what words scare us and why. Politicians seem to know our scare words and use them effectively.