

election George Bush and Michael Dukakis each received \$46.1 million for their campaigns. Political parties also receive funds to cover national convention expenses.

But a lack of public knowledge about the check-off and the presidential campaign fund has contributed to a decline in the number of people who check "yes," which directs a dollar of the taxes already owed to the fund. What's more, the checkoff amount has never been adjusted for inflation, even though a dollar in 1972, when the checkoff was created, is now worth 36 cents. These two factors are expected to trigger a substantial shortfall for the 1996 election and have led to proposals to increase the check-off amount.

Working with six professional organizations, the FEC has targeted tax professionals, who prepare nearly half of all individual tax re-

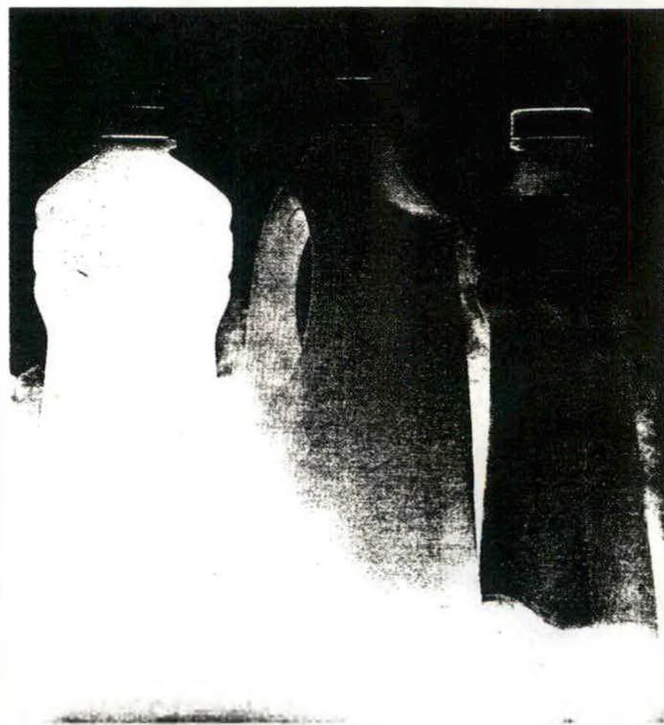
turns. In a random sampling the Internal Revenue Service found that 18.8 percent of professionally prepared tax returns in 1989 failed to check either "yes" or "no," compared to 11.2 percent of returns completed without a professional. Failure to check a box is the equivalent of "no."

Realizing that tax preparers are "on the front lines of the tax checkoff question," the National Society of Public Accountants (NSPA) has urged its members to "recognize [their] obligation to help taxpayers make an informed choice."

Some tax preparers are prejudiced against the dollar checkoff. "The tax preparer's bias is going to have an overwhelming sway on the taxpayer's decision," says Peter Berkery, director of federal affairs/tax counsel for the NSPA. Berkery estimates that more than half of his group's 23,000 members have negative feelings about publicly funded campaigns. There's also a "screw the system" mentality among some clients, he says.

Some tax preparers would rather skip the question altogether. "If you figure 10 minutes to interview a client and five more minutes to explain that the checkoff doesn't affect your tax rate, most preparers, us included, just don't ask. Normally we leave it blank," says James J. Fromi, a tax preparer and president of Taxbyte, a tax software development firm.

Other preparers take a different view, arguing that public financing increases the average taxpayer's political power. Jeffrey Lane, a certified public accountant in Jessup, Md., says, "If a taxpayer is especially disgruntled with the politicians and the system, check 'yes' to change it." —A. Y.



CLEANING UP DISINFECTANTS

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is looking into allegations that the manufacturer of a popular household disinfectant concealed evidence that the solution contained trace amounts of dioxin, an industrial contaminant believed to pose health risks.

There are different kinds of dioxin, which occur as by-products in some chemical manufacturing. Scientists disagree about whether there is such a thing as a "safe" level of exposure.

Monsanto discovered TCDD, the most potent form of dioxin, in its disinfectant, called Santophen, in the early 1970s. But Monsanto continued making the disinfectant and did not inform the makers of Lysol — Lehn & Fink Products — about the dioxin problem out of fear that the company would stop buying Santophen, according to testimony given by Monsanto officials in a 1985 court case.

Monsanto also did not inform EPA about the contamination of Santophen with TCDD as required by federal law, according to Cate Jenkins, a senior scientist in EPA's regulatory branch. EPA is reviewing Monsanto's failure to relay this information as part of a larger probe of allegations that Monsanto falsified health effects studies in an effort to hide potential health risks from exposure to dioxin.

In 1983 Monsanto stopped manufacturing Santophen. But Dow Chemical and other companies began selling similar disinfectants. Today the offending chemical is used in some 127 cleaning products, including liquid Lysol, and all of them should be tested for dioxin, according to Jenkins.

In 1985 scientists at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) stumbled onto the presence of dioxin in one cleaning solution when they

QUOTES

"[There are] few lies more pronounced than the words uttered by feminists."

—Rep. Bill Dannemeyer (R-Calif.), April 23, 1991

"There are few male character traits more loathsome than showing disrespect for women."

—Rep. Dannemeyer, one week later

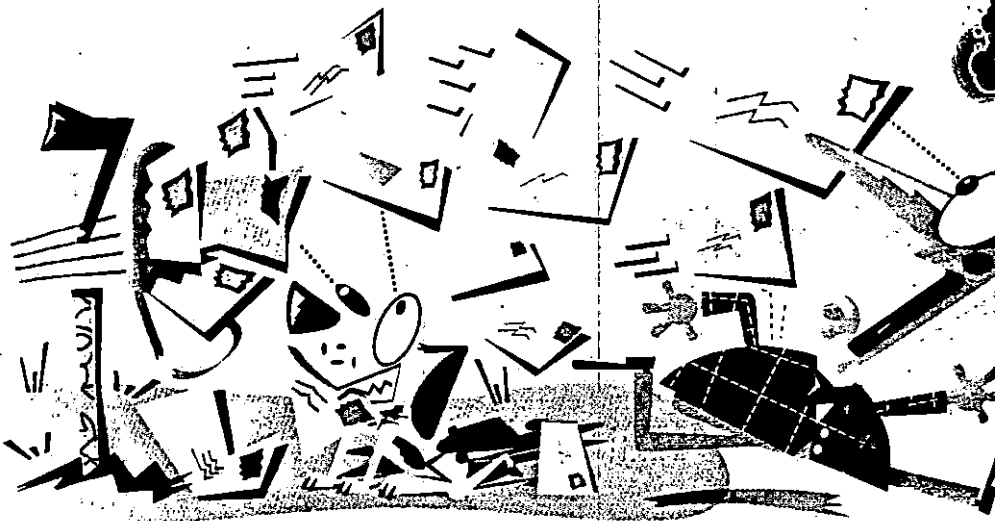
were developing a method for identifying TCDD in human fat tissue and other forms of dioxin showed up in their testing materials. It turned out that there was dioxin in the solution used to wash the floors in the building where the laboratory was located — and the solution was identical to one previously made by Monsanto. In a paper published in 1986 the scientists said they felt "this cleaning solution does not present a health risk to workers"; at the same time, however, they cited a 1975 study suggesting a possible connection between exposure to it and a type of liver disease that has been linked to dioxin.

Thus far EPA has yet to look into the question of whether a number of disinfectants are contaminated by dioxin, although Jenkins believes there's enough evidence to suggest that the problem is widespread. She also raises concerns about the possible stockpiling of Santophen. One Canadian company, Ostrem Chemical, continued using the product until May 1990, according to owner Roar Tunland.

Lehn & Fink says it tested samples of Lysol dating from the use of Santophen between the early 1970s and 1983 and found no dioxin. The company also says it is confident, based on assurances from its current supplier, that the disinfectants it manufactures today are dioxin-free.

But Jenkins still questions whether the products are dioxin-free, given the seemingly consistent contamination of disinfectants with the troublesome byproduct.

—Anthony L. Kimery
(Anthony Kimery is a Washington writer.)



RETURNS FOR SENDERS

The U.S. Postal Service — the butt of so many complaints about inefficient service — is on its toes in one way the average mail recipient might not appreciate.

The same system that enables the Postal Service to forward your mail to a new address also alerts scads of direct marketers — from the folks at your favorite mail-order company to those pesky tricksters who say they have a special gift waiting if only you'll call — to your new whereabouts.

The system seems to work for better and for worse. For better: You get the mail you want and the Postal Service saves time and money by not delivering mail to the wrong address. For worse: Junk mailers you never wanted to hear from discover your new address and waste no time making use of it.

Postal officials insist that they share change-of-address information only with those who already have your old address. But thanks to the large-scale selling and renting of customer lists among direct mail marketers, some companies that never knew you existed will

have your particulars.

The Postal Service forwards about 2.3 billion pieces of mail a year for the 40 million Americans who move annually, at a cost of some \$1 billion, says Bob Krause, director of the Postal Service's National Change of Address (NCOA) system.

Meanwhile 19 companies, including some of the largest direct-marketing list management firms, pay the Postal Service an annual fee of roughly \$48,000 to receive computerized NCOA updates every two weeks. These "licensees" then provide the updated information to their customers, who pay for address changes for consumers already on their mailing lists.

The Post Office places great importance on keeping address-correction information secure, Krause says, and the licensees must follow strict guidelines on what they can do with it. They may not use the information to develop mailing lists. But direct marketers who properly obtain the information from the Post Office or its licensees can make it available to others with impunity.

Ann Zeller, vice president for information and special projects of the Direct Marketing Association, concedes that firms can buy names from a direct mailer who has a consumer's new address.

Evan Hendricks, editor of the Washington-based *Privacy Times* newsletter, is "very suspicious" of the system. Without realizing it, individuals who complete change-of-address cards are "permanently giving away their addresses to anyone who asks for them," he says and that should be clearly

**JUST THE
FACTS**

Ultimate cost of the Superfund toxic waste site cleanup program, as calculated by reporter Frank Viviano of the *San Francisco Chronicle*: \$1 trillion

Amount that will go to "transaction" costs — mostly lawyers' fees: \$200 billion

Source: Hotline