

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. MacEachen:** I do not intend to fall into the obvious trap which the hon. member is attempting to set.

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**HEALTH**

## FORMALDEHYDE GAS LEVELS

**Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River):** Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. It concerns a very serious health problem which is becoming more and more evident. Recently a study released by Dr. Yves Alary, who is head of the School of Environmental Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh, indicated that the level of formaldehyde gas in homes established at 0.1 parts per million was far too high. His figures indicated that there was serious health damage with a level as low as 0.03 parts per million. Is there any indication on the part of the government that it is willing to reduce to this established level of 0.03 parts per million as the safe level in homes? Of course the minister must realize that this would dramatically increase the number of Canadian home owners with urea formaldehyde foam insulation who would qualify for the government's program if it were to do so.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Madam Speaker, the scientific data used by my department to determine what UFFI gas level is harmful to a person's health are in our view extremely sound and very much on the conservative side, since ample allowance is made for the individual's state of health, even for those suffering from allergies. We have therefore no reason to change or lower the standard we have set.

● (1125)

[*English*]

**Mr. Skelly:** Unfortunately, the evidence gathering on this subject indicates to the contrary. The study by Bruce Small, the study by Alfred Nantel, and now the study by Yves Alary indicate clearly that there is a problem and that those norms were set too high. The Ontario Department of Health study also indicates that those norms were too high.

## DEPARTMENTAL STUDIES

**Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River):** Madam Speaker, I would ask the minister whether or not the government would be prepared to consider conducting studies that would either confirm or at least shed more light on the matter. Will she be prepared at this time to tell the House what studies her department is doing to determine whether or not this norm of 0.1 parts per million is adequate? Also, has she looked into

substantiating the work that has been done by three other competent individuals in this field?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Madam Speaker, studies are constantly being done on the alleged effects of urea formaldehyde foam. The hon. member is referring to newspaper articles about certain studies that were published very recently. A number of conclusions were made, and they should be considered and compared with many other studies which do not necessarily support these results. As for the Canadian studies I have just approved under the National Health Research Development Program, I would have preferred to receive notice of his question, in which case I would gladly have given him the information verbally. In the circumstances, I shall send him a letter with a list of the approved studies and a brief description of the field covered by each study.

[*English*]

**Mr. Skelly:** Certainly I believe the common knowledge of what is being done is one matter, but I express deep concern about the health question involved.

## PROVISION OF DISASTER EMERGENCY FUNDING

**Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River):** Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Minister of Public Works responsible for housing. There is information which comes from statements by officials of the Government of Canada indicating that where a province is willing to avail itself of the provisions available under national disaster programs to put up moneys to assist victims of urea formaldehyde foam insulation, the federal government would come forward and add an equivalent amount. There are groups who are now talking to provincial governments about this matter. There has been no clear statement from the federal government on whether it was serious, or whether this was just another off the wall comment. Would the minister clarify whether or not there has been serious consideration given to discussing, with the provinces and home owners, a method of implementing that particular idea?

**Hon. Paul J. Cosgrove (Minister of Public Works):** Madam Speaker, that is a matter which was administered by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. On a couple of occasions he indicated in the House that he had already contacted the appropriate ministers in the provinces and asked for their co-operation. My recollection is that the co-operation from the provinces has not been forthcoming. However, I will take the hon. member's question under notice, discuss it with the minister, and perhaps he can get back to the member.