

COPY

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December 8, 1964

Dr. Donald Hornig  
Special Assistant to the President for Science and Technology  
The White House  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Dr. Hornig,

Recently, certain compounds have been found by microbiologists to be exceedingly mutagenic without being very toxic. The possibility that some relatively non-toxic substances might be highly mutagenic to man deserves careful attention. The prevalence of non-toxic mutagens could go unnoticed until serious genetic damage had already been done. Furthermore, such agents might be without much direct effect on fertility. In that case, a considerable number of mutations could be introduced into the human gene pool by a heavily exposed sub-population.

Our present understanding of chemical mutagenesis and of human genetics is adequate to set up some safety guidelines and monitoring procedures and to designate relevant problems on which further research might be focused. If, as is my understanding, there is at present no coordinated attention and direction being given to these matters, it might be well to begin by bringing together a group of specialists to discuss some of the problems, possibly under the auspices of the National Academy.

Sincerely yours,

Matthew Meselson  
Professor of Biology

cc: Professor Paul Doty