

important, the agency is considering rescheduling such drugs to put them in a more tightly regulated category because of their abuse potential. Amphetamines were, in fact, put into Schedule II—the most closely regulated category—a year ago, but some of the other related drugs were not rescheduled at that time.

Dr Simmons pointed out that rescheduling amphetamines immediately produced a dramatic decline in the number of prescriptions for them—the number of prescriptions dropped from 2 million a month to about 670,000—and he believes that when the other appetite-suppressants are rescheduled there will be a similar decrease in their use. The FDA's policy is therefore one of discouragement, but not of outright disapproval.

Asked by Senator Gaylord Nelson, chairman of the Monopolies Subcommittee, why the FDA decided to allow the drugs to remain on the market in spite of the triviality of their effect and their abuse potential, Dr Simmons replied that the problem of obesity in the United States is so great that doctors need every weapon at hand to fight it. Even though the effect of the drugs on average is trivial, they have been very beneficial in some cases, and should be kept as a last resort.

But other witnesses before the committee took issue with the FDA's position. Dr Jay Tepperman, professor of experimental medicine at the State University of New York, for example, pointed out that the efficacy trials lasted for only a few weeks, and no follow-up studies have so far been attempted with the patients involved. "It is astonishing that 'efficacy' in the case of amphetamine-like drugs is defined as the ability of the drug to induce a statistically significant excess weight loss over that achieved by diet and a placebo alone over a period of a few weeks", he said. "There is absolutely no evidence that the trivial additional weight loss attributable to this class of drugs has any effect whatever on the long-range fate of the obese patient." He concluded that use of these drugs in the treatment of obese patients "should be discouraged".

Similarly, Dr Meyer said that "in the case of amphetamines, the limited usefulness to some patients does not counterbalance the enormous societal cost brought about by the availability of 'pep pills'". But instead of banning appetite-suppressants outright, Dr Meyer suggested that the FDA should simply remove some products from the market, leaving only one or two for the treatment of such diseases as narcolepsy. "By no stretch of the imagination do we need the number or variety of preparations now in existence," he said. Such a policy would also stop the drug

companies from assaulting doctors with advertisements claiming that their products are highly effective. But the policy would, of course, be difficult to put into effect in a free market economy, and the FDA is therefore stuck with a policy of either discouragement or outright disapproval. At present it is opting for discouragement.

CLEAN AIR

Back to World War II

by our Washington Correspondent

THE Environmental Protection Agency's regional office in California has come up with a drastic plan for meeting the air quality standards prescribed by the Clean Air Act in Los Angeles and surrounding counties—petrol rationing. According to a study carried out by a technical committee appointed by the regional office, petrol consumption must be cut by 86 per cent between May and October if the area is to have a hope of meeting the air quality standards. Such a move, the office estimates, would eliminate nearly 200 tons of hydrocarbons emitted to the atmosphere each day, but even this would not be sufficient to meet the standards, and the remainder would

have to be removed by emission control devices on automobiles and industrial plants.

The Clean Air Act empowered the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency to set nation-wide ambient air quality standards, and the states were told to draw up their own plans for meeting them. Los Angeles and six other counties in Southern California said that they could not meet the standards, however, and so the EPA itself must draw up implementation plans. The rationing scheme is very preliminary and it has been sent to the EPA head office in Washington for approval. If approved by Mr William D. Ruckelshaus, Administrator of the EPA, rationing would start in 1975. Ruckelshaus has, in any case, been ordered by a court in Los Angeles to submit a final plan by January 15, 1973.

Clearly, as it now stands, the rationing plan would bring most of the Los Angeles area to a grinding halt, and even if it is approved by Ruckelshaus, it is unlikely that Congress would allow the plan to go ahead. Having seen that the standards prescribed by the Clean Air Act are too stringent in the Los Angeles area, Congress would probably be forced to make an exception—a move which could open up the flood-gates for special pleading from other parts of the country. If Ruckelshaus does approve a modified version of the plan, at least he would put the ball firmly back into Congress's court.

HEALTH

Marston to Go

PRESIDENT NIXON'S reshuffle of the executive has made nearly a clean sweep of the federal government's top health officials. Latest casualty is Dr Robert Q. Marston, Director of the National Institutes of Health. Marston was informed last week that his pro forma resignation has been accepted, and that a new director for NIH will be appointed in the next few weeks. His dismissal follows the shifting of Mr Elliot Richardson from Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare to Secretary of Defense, and the resignations of Merlin K. Duval, Assistant Secretary for Health, and Vernon E. Wilson, Administrator of Health Services and Mental Health.

Marston's dismissal came as a surprise, because there had previously been no indication that Nixon wanted to replace him. He came to NIH in 1968, to replace Dr James Shannon, and during his four years in office, NIH's budget has increased from about \$1,300 million to an estimated \$2,100 million this year. Marston, who left for a meeting in Europe immediately after he received news of his dismissal, said he would probably remain at NIH in some capacity at least until next summer.

Short Notes

Ocean Currents

SCIENTIFIC agencies in France, the United States, Japan and the United Kingdom are cooperating on a project designed to obtain information on ocean circulation near the Antarctic continent. The plan is to place transmitters on several icebergs in the Antarctic and then to track their movements by Eole-1, a French satellite launched last year. Data resulting from the operation will be collected by the French National space research centre and distributed to the cooperating countries.

Next ACS President

DR BERNARD S. FRIEDMAN, a professor at the University of Chicago who has had a long career in the oil industry, has been chosen as president-elect of the American Chemical Society by mail ballot. Dr Friedman will take over as ACS President from Alan Nixon on January 1, 1974. As president-elect, he will join the ACS board in January for a three-year term. Dr Gardner W. Stacey and Dr David S. Breslow were also elected to serve three-year terms on the ACS board of directors.