

## Hot Microwave Debate

By Nancy L. Ross

Microwave ovens, including those that meet current government standards, still present a potential health hazard from radiation leakage, according to the April issue of Consumer Reports.

Citing a study that shows microwaves cause cataracts in laboratory animals, the magazine advises readers against buying the appliances until there is "sufficient evidence" of no leakage "even under the most severe conditions."

A spokesman for the Bureau of Radiological Health, a branch of the Food and Drug Administration, which devised oven standards in 1971, challenged the finding.

"We believe our standard (five milliwatts per square centimeter at a distance of about two inches from the oven) is adequate for good safe use in the home," said Robert De Vore. He charged Consumers Union (CU), the nonprofit parent organization that publishes Consumer Reports, with misusing the ovens and with not

following the directions provided for their use.

CU engineers said they found up to 20 milliwatts when they tried to simulate what could occur in home use of a counter-top microwave oven. In one model, a paper towel caught in the door, causing what was termed high leakage. Another model had high leakage through the viewing window, CU reports.

The magazine warns those who may wish to buy these ovens in spite of CU's advice to be sure to keep the appliance scrupulously clean (dirt can affect the tightness of the door seal); to keep children away from it; unplug it when not in use; avoid peering into the window when the oven is on; and to keep several feet away from it.

Readers are also warned to keep away from vending machines that heat with microwaves. Wearers of pacemakers should avoid getting near any microwave device, the magazine said, since the operation of the device may be affected by the waves.