Thomas Midgley Jr Encyclopedia Article

Thomas Midgley Jr

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1889-1944

American industrial chemist best known for discovering chlorofluorocarbons, which are widely used for producing plastics and cleaning electronic components. Midgley introduced the chlorofluorocarbon Freon-12 in 1930 as a non-corrosive, nontoxic, and nonflammable refrigerant. Midgley also discovered the anti-knock fuel additive tetraethyl lead (1921). He then developed a method for extracting the very scarce bromine from seawater when it was discovered that it was required to prevent tetraethyl lead from fouling engine valves and spark plugs.