

yet a perfect one. Texts on closed-circuit television can be blurry, and a demonstration hard copy obligingly made for this reporter was almost vanishingly faint, apparently because the mix of chemicals in the copying machine was wrong. But the operators of the system are confident that the wrinkles can be ironed out.

Serious consideration of a new information system at the *Times* dates back about 5 years. At that time, an effort was made to evaluate what was being done by the *Times* morgue and indexing staff, what the requirements of the company were, and what the commercial possibilities might be. Competitive bids were invited, and IBM's federal systems people were successful. IBM is the major contractor, having provided the software for the information bank, the display terminals, and the main computer (a 371-45) and peripherals. Other hardware is supplied by several other manufacturers.

The advent of the new system apparently caused no technological unemployment at the *Times*. Because of the central role played by the indexing staff, the human element in the system remains particularly strong. (The indexing staff is comprised of 26 indexers and six senior editors. The indexers are specialists in particular fields, such as science, education, or finance.) The editors designate clippings from the *Times* to be processed by individual indexers. The indexers then prepare the abstracts and assign them entry terms, through which information is stored and retrieved, using "descriptors" from a special thesaurus of subject terms.

Processed material goes into a special storage area in the computer, and a printout of it goes to the editor and indexer for review. Any corrections needed can be done on-line, and the entry is held out of permanent storage until the editor is satisfied with its quality.

Right now there is a lag of about 7 days between the time material is published and the time the abstract becomes available in the information bank, but an effort is being made to reduce the lag further.

The information bank includes selected material from about 65 publications in addition to the *Times*. These newspapers and magazines include *Science*, *Scientific American*, and *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. Abstracting for these other publications is done by outside services. Virtually all news and editorial material goes

into the bank, and even some advertising the *Times* describes as having "potential research value" is included. The other publications are gleaned for material that in various ways fills the needs of the system.

The data base now includes *Times* material dating back to 1 November 1969. It is unlikely that any full-scale effort to extend the data base back further will be made. It has been found that 80 percent of inquiries deal with material that falls within the previous 5 years. As a man from the *Times* information services staff said, "Originally, a lot of people jumped to the conclusion that we would put everything in the morgue into the computer. But that would not be economic or efficient."

It is true that this leaves 20 percent of inquiries which the information bank

cannot deal with. No conclusions, apparently, have been reached on how to cope with this. The word is that machine capabilities are being evaluated and ways of storing information in off-line form—that is, not in the information bank—are being studied. The working assumption is that at some point the morgue will be phased out, but there are no firm predictions on when this will happen.

The original plan was to have a system that would accommodate some 25 years' worth of *Times* material in the information bank without purging, but there seems to be a real question now as to whether such a long period is necessary.

What about acceptance of the new system by the users for which it was primarily designed, the reporters and editors of the *Times*? Although the

Alaska Pipeline: NEPA Put Aside

Perhaps the most striking demonstration of the value of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to environmentalists has been the use that has been made of it to hold up construction of the trans-Alaska pipeline (TAP) over the past 3 years. Given recent actions in the House and Senate, however, it now appears that Congress will direct that TAP be built without further court review under NEPA. Making this all the more discouraging from the environmentalists' standpoint is the fact that the Nixon Administration is lending its support to this breach of the act.

On 2 August, the House passed a bill—similar to a measure approved by the Senate in July (*Science*, 27 July)—that would declare NEPA's requirement for an environmental impact study to have been met in the case of the TAP. The House divided 221 to 198 in the critical vote on this issue. This legislative determination is being made despite clear evidence that the impact study did not include a thorough analysis of the alternative of building the pipeline across Canada instead of across Alaska (*Science*, 9 March). Without such an edict environmental lawyers are convinced that the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, where the TAP case is now pending, would order that a more adequate impact study be prepared.

Prior to the House vote President Nixon, in a letter to Speaker of the House Carl Albert, endorsed the exemption of the TAP project from further judicial review. In light of the "unique circumstances" surrounding the pipeline issue, Nixon said, such an exemption from NEPA could not "properly be construed as a precedent." It is a precedent, however, and it is one that may be cited repeatedly in future years by oil companies, electric utilities, and other interests impatient to get on with their projects, some of which may have as much relevance to substantial national problems as the TAP has to the U.S. oil deficit.

Final action on the TAP legislation will not occur until after differences in the House and Senate bills have been resolved in conference. Those differences have to do mainly with whether existing law pertaining to rights-of-way across federal domain lands should be broadly rewritten, as in the Senate bill, or whether, as in the House bill, that law should be left unchanged for the moment except for lifting the prohibitive 50-foot-width limitation as it applies to the TAP.—L.J.C.