ments in the selection of repository sites should be one of "consultation and concurrence," which means that the states would be consulted about candidate sites within their boundaries and given the right to reject them.

DOE has been saying in recent years that the states already have a "de facto veto" over site selections. By recommending that the President explicitly recognize that the states should have a right of concurrence, the IRG was hoping that the states could be brought around to a more willing and cooperative attitude. As matters stand, more than a dozen states have enacted laws that either flatly prohibit or make difficult the establishment of radwaste repositories.

What seems especially to be needed at this point is for the President to present all of the major elements of the Administration's radwaste policy to Congress in a coherent, persuasive, and forceful statement. For instance, a case can be made that the proposed AFR program and the geologic repository program are mutually supporting. If assured that there will be adequate AFR storage, the government can proceed cautiously and deliberately with repository development, making it far less likely that the program will end in another failure such as the attempt in the early 1970's to establish a repository in a salt formation in Kansas which was ultimately found to have numerous drill holes from previous exploration for oil and gas. At the same time, having a well-funded repository development program under way can be pointed to as evidence that AFR storage is not one of those provisional measures that will go on forever and frustrate attainment of a permanent solution.

There is, however, a strong tendency for environmentalists to see the AFR storage program as an unwelcome stopgap that "lets the nuclear industry off the hook" on the radwaste issue. For their part, many in the nuclear industry view the repository program as not merely technically conservative, but as driven by a desire to ensure the security and permanence of waste isolation to a degree that is unattainable given the immense time spans involved. Also, they suspect that the anti-nukes really do not want to see an early solution to the waste problem and that they prefer instead to cite the continuing accumulation of wastes at the reactor sites as an argument to shut down nuclear power.

In his present weak political condition, President Carter may find it difficult to assert effective leadership on so controversial and divisive an issue as radwaste policy. Even so, he could establish

Cancer Policy Announced

The heads of the major Washington regulatory agencies gathered on 28 September to announce with considerable fanfare that they had reached agreement on a national policy for the regulation of chemical carcinogens.

The agencies "will work together to combat these hazards, will use the same scientific basis for their actions, and take . . . the least disruptive, most efficient path to minimizing or eliminating the dangers," said Douglas Costle, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and chairman of the Federal Regulatory Council, which coordinated the agreement.

The announcement, which was made in the Old Executive Office Building adjacent to the White House, contained little in the way of news. The President's top domestic adviser, Stuart Eizenstat, appeared just long enough to give a 3-minute speech on behalf of President Carter's general deregulation effort and disappear, leaving the Carter regulatory appointees behind to talk up a major new initiative. In fact, the spirit of the occasion was dampened considerably when the bureaucrats acknowledged they had barely disagreed about the regulation of carcinogens in the first place.

Costle spoke of the need 11 months ago, when the government first began grappling with a policy statement, to "head off a confusing situation" in which each agency was preparing to write its own carcinogen policy. Several of the agencies still have plans to do that, but supposedly each will come under the umbrella of broad ideas outlined by the council. "The left hand will [now] know what the right is doing," Costle predicted.

No one, however, could identify exactly how an agency might differently regulate a carcinogen, now that a uniform policy has been enacted. "The effect of the policy is more subtle than that," said one official.

Most of the policy reaffirms principles that have come into wide acceptance among federal scientists within the last decade. It vigorously supports the validity of animal tests for the prediction of human hazard, for example. Recently, the President's Council on Environmental Quality noted that 22 prestigious scientific reports have endorsed this principle since 1956. The new federal policy also points out the need to assess human health risks, and the importance for each agency to take most seriously the greatest health risks within its jurisdiction.

Federal regulators find value in strumming these harps repeatedly. "The policy demonstrates a broad consensus to the public and to industry," says Steve Jellinek, associate administrator for toxic substances at EPA. "We are taking a consistent intellectual stand and presenting a unified view."

In those isolated areas where a dispute really did exist, such as the currently hot topic of cost-benefit analysis, the language of the policy document was deliberately fudged so that the consensus could be maintained. About the issue of removing a carcinogen from the environment so that no risk remains, for example, the policy has this to say: "In some cases, zero risk will be an appropriate regulatory goal," particularly when chemical substitutes are less costly and create no risks of their own. On the other hand, "zero risk will not routinely be considered achievable." And in any event, "these principles will ordinarily guide the agencies in initiating regulatory actions, but they will not be rigidly and uniformly applied in all cases."

The policy also sidesteps the controversial issue of whether the regulators should be forced to estimate exact human exposure to a risk, and to quantify it in excess deaths or other terms. Several of the federal statutes on carcinogens are silent on the point, and some of the regulators would prefer not to make such estimates unless forced to do so. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, for example, prefers to identify a hazard and order correction, without first detailing the level and significance of the human exposure. The new national cancer policy states firmly that "the particular form and type of risk assessment will depend on the suitability of the available information to support different types of analyses, and upon the amount of information the agency needs to support proposed regulatory actions." Explicit direction, that is not.—R. JEFFREY SMITH

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