

The epidemiologists, who offered their help to area officials, began their study in early December and expect to finish a report by the end of the month. To date, however, the news is not encouraging. Feldman said, "We may or may not find any risk factors. So far we haven't found anything."

Dump Delaney Clause, Schweiker Suggests

Secretary-designate of the Department of Health and Human Services, Richard S. Schweiker, believes that the Delaney clause should be scrapped. During his Senate confirmation hearing on 6 January, the former Pennsylvania senator said that he preferred a risk-benefit approach to food safety rather than the Delaney rule, which bans the use of food additives shown to cause cancer in animals.

When asked by one of his former senatorial colleagues about the con-



Richard S. Schweiker

trovercy over nitrites, Schweiker criticized the current rule. "We have to redefine the clause in terms of a risk-benefit ratio. The regulation has to relate to present technology," he said. "Now we can find parts per billion of a substance in laboratory tests, so I am receptive to the risk-benefit approach."

In other matters, Schweiker was quizzed mainly about social service programs such as national health insurance and Social Security. References to scientific research were made only briefly during the 2-hour hearing before members of the Senate Finance Committee, who praised Schweiker as the future HHS secretary.

At one point, Schweiker was asked what he would like his one achievement to be after serving as HHS secretary. "I'd like to be remembered as putting preventive health care and

preventive medicine at the top of the list of priorities," replied Schweiker, 54, who says he jogs 2 miles a day. Then, in the only reference to research, he commented that studies should emphasize "what keeps people well, not only what happens after they become ill."

Schweiker was active in health care policy while a senator. He served as ranking Republican member of the Labor and Human Resources Committee and of the labor, health, and education appropriations subcommittee.

White Sands, Warm Winds, and . . . Toxic Wastes?

The Bahamas and other Latin-American countries could become the dumping ground for American chemical trash, which a company in Alabama plans to collect and export. But the Birmingham-based firm, Ashvins, Inc., has run into a barrelful of problems causing delay.

The State Department, concerned that shipping wastes to less-developed countries could prove to be embarrassing to the United States, has already met with the Bahamian ambassador to the U.S., to notify him of Ashvins' plans. The department has also cabled U.S. embassies in Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala that waste exports may be coming their way via Ashvins.

The company applied for permission to begin collecting waste just before stricter federal controls on hazardous wastes went into effect last November. Ashvins already has contracts with several American companies to collect chemical waste and is negotiating with a private Bahamian company to accept shipment, according to Ashvins spokesman, John M. Smith.

The policy of the Bahamian government, however, has been to refuse hazardous wastes from other countries, said a top Bahamian health official. The Bahamas already has chemical dumps on the island of Grand Bahama for their own petroleum and chemical industries. But Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health, Harold Munnings, said that it was unlikely he would recommend that foreign waste be allowed into the coun-

try. "Why should we inherit someone else's problem?" he said in a telephone interview.

Company spokesman Smith said that, despite the numerous problems, the firm is determined to forge ahead. He said that critics have called Ashvins "a shady operation, but it's a business venture like anything else. People get spooked when you mention hazardous wastes." But, in response to a question, Smith said that none of Ashvins' officers has a background in handling waste. Nor does the company have a technical expert on staff. Smith said the firm has contracted with laboratory and engineering firms to handle technical problems.

Before Ashvins can export the waste, it will first have to get Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approval to begin collection in the U.S. The main point of contention between EPA and Ashvins is whether the firm was "in existence," according to EPA criteria, before 19 November, when the stricter controls went into effect. The company, which filed its application 16 November, argues that they met the agency's requirements.

EPA attorney, David Engle, said that Ashvins' application needs, for example, to list what type and what quantity of wastes the company will handle. Smith said that Ashvins will not handle anything radioactive, explosive, or bacterial. But that still leaves an enormous list of more than 400 hazardous and toxic wastes.

If Ashvins is finally permitted to collect wastes, it can then begin exporting. The U.S. government has no authority to ban shipment outside its borders. Under the current system of monitoring such exports, the State Department largely relies on information from EPA and then alerts the foreign government involved.

Director of the State Department's office of environment and health, Donald King, said that exports of hazardous wastes can pose sensitive problems for the United States. For almost a year, the State Department, EPA, and other agencies have been considering a proposal to require an export license for waste, but the government has yet to adopt a stricter policy.

King says that he favors the idea of export licenses, but that the State Department "has managed all right under the current system."

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