
Research Information Service Imperiled

The Smithsonian Science Information Exchange (SSIE), for 30 years the only source of information on all federally funded research in progress, now faces the possibility of strangulation by budget reduction.

The service, originally started by several health-related agencies as the Medical Sciences Information Exchange, now has a staff of 77 who prepare publications about ongoing government research in all areas and maintain a computerized index of projects. Although the service was made into a private corporation in 1971, it has received funding from various federal sources throughout its existence. For the past 2 years it has been subsidized by the Commerce Department and before that by the Smithsonian Institution.

In 1977 a General Accounting Office report recommended that the exchange be "federalized" to lay to rest questions about its ambiguous public/private status. There appeared to be general agreement that SSIE should become part of the Department of Commerce's National Technical Information Service (NTIS), but delays in Congress and protests by SSIE employees caused final action to be postponed.

Then along came the Reagan Administration, which in its fiscal 1982 budget proposed that SSIE retain its private status. It also proposed a \$300,000 cut in its appropriations, to \$1.7 million.

The SSIE is now in a very awkward and precarious position, according to its president, David Hersey. Smithsonian officials still dominate the corporation's board, even though the SSIE appropriation now comes through the Commerce Department. The Smithsonian Institution no longer wants any responsibility for the SSIE, however, and it may end its role in the corporation. The data base would then presumably be absorbed by NTIS.

For the service to continue at its present level, a congressional commitment would have to be made to spend what is necessary to retain the staff and continue the full range of services after SSIE's absorption by

NTIS. But even then, serious problems loom because the Office of Management and Budget wants the government to stop subsidizing its information services and get users to pay the full costs of data collection and preparation. SSIE is supposed to achieve full cost recovery by 1984. Only about one third of its expenses are now paid by users. So far, says Hersey, "no one has come up with a rational plan to get total cost recovery." Besides, jacking up user fees may be robbing Peter to pay Paul, since 70 percent of SSIE users are other government agencies.

At this point it is most likely that absorption into NTIS will turn the service into a shadow of its former self. A resource embodying 30 years of accumulated expertise "will be thrown away," says SSIE vice president Donald Elliott.

Smithsonian officials won't comment pending forthcoming talks with the House and Senate committees. Neither will NTIS director Melvin Day, who says he doesn't know what position the Commerce Department will take.—**Constance Holden**

Study Shows Formaldehyde Is Carcinogenic

A New York University (NYU) study has provided "decisive confirmation" of industry findings that formaldehyde is an animal carcinogen, according to Arthur Upton, chairman of NYU's Institute of Environmental Medicine and former director of the National Cancer Institute.

The new results buttress the position of many leading scientists, including government epidemiologist Peter Infante, that formaldehyde causes cancer in animals. For stating his opinion about formaldehyde, Infante was nearly fired recently by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (*Science*, 7 August, p. 630). The agency, however, did an about face and dropped its proposal to dismiss Infante.

The NYU findings will no doubt be seriously weighed by the Consumer Product Safety Commission, which is currently considering whether to ban the use of urea formaldehyde foam

insulation. "We're reviewing a truckload of comments," said Peter Preuss, associate executive director for health sciences at the consumer agency. He said that an agency panel is to make its recommendation to the commission by the end of November. Several months ago, Canada banned the use of urea formaldehyde foam insulation, pending a review of additional scientific data. Massachusetts and, recently, Connecticut have also banned the use of the insulation.

The NYU study is a followup of another experiment by researchers there who found that a combination of formaldehyde and hydrochloric acid caused cancer in rats. The two chemicals were then studied separately and the results support the original findings, Upton said in a letter to the heads of several government research institutes and OSHA.

Formaldehyde alone caused nasal cancers in 10 of 100 rats exposed to 10.6 and 14.6 parts per million, Upton reported. No cancers appeared in the 100 controls. He noted that the researchers have not observed "a single grossly visible spontaneous nasal cancer in 1920 control rats over a period of 14 years." Some industrial workers are exposed to levels of formaldehyde up to 10 ppm. Hydrochloric acid, when tested alone, did not induce any nasal cancers, Upton said.—**Marjorie Sun**

Round Two of Budget Cuts Is Approaching

The Reagan Administration economic program has produced an early casualty: the projection first made last March that the 1982 budget deficit would be only \$42.5 billion no longer holds up. Congressional budget experts say that high interest rates, slow economic growth, and an unexpectedly fast rate of federal spending have combined to increase the expected deficit by \$15 to \$18 billion. As a result, Administration officials and a number of congressmen are on a search for budget reductions beyond those approved in the penurious frenzy of July, before the congressional recess.

White House and public attention