

Solar Programs on the Chopping Block Again

A year ago, federal support for solar energy was headed toward \$1 billion a year. Then along came the Reagan Administration. Now, the Department of Energy's solar programs will be lucky to get \$100 million in fiscal year (FY) 1983.

Under a budget plan drafted by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which is circulating on Capitol Hill, support for solar energy is scheduled to drop to \$79 million in FY 1983. When the Reagan Administration took over, solar programs were receiving more than \$500 million a year. Support for energy conservation is headed in the same direction: the OMB plan would reduce spending to \$30 million, a 90 percent reduction from the level that prevailed in the final year of the Carter Administration.

Nuclear power, in contrast, is not expected to share in the carnage. The budget for nuclear fission would rise to \$1.7 billion under OMB's plan. This would add up to an increase of more than \$500 million during the first 2 years of the Reagan Administration.

The OMB figures are the opening shots in negotiations over the FY 1983 budget, and they are certain to change. The direction, however, is clear, and it is likely to heighten unease in the Solar Energy Research Institute (SERI).

SERI's budget for FY 1981 slid from \$143 million under the Carter Administration's original proposals to \$103 million after Reagan's budget-cutters had finished with it. It is expected to plummet to about \$50 million in FY 1982. So far this year, 345 people have lost their jobs at SERI, including its former director, Denis Hayes.

This has cast a good deal of gloom over the place, and SERI's future has been far from certain. SERI is operated by the Midwest Research Institute under a contract with the Department of Energy, but the contract is due to expire in April next year and DOE has been dragging its feet in agreeing to an extension. This gave rise to suspicion that DOE was contemplating shutting the place down. Last week, however, DOE finally announced that it will extend the contract with the Midwest Research Institute until 30

June 1983, and said that it will seek competitive bids to operate SERI after that.

The contract renewal should add at least some temporary stability to SERI, but equally important for morale will be to find a permanent director for the institute. Hayes, an outspoken advocate for solar energy, was fired by the Midwest Research Institute in June but a search committee for a new director was not named until mid-September. The committee, which includes Arthur Bueche, chief of research at General Electric, and Betsy Ancker-Johnson, former assistant secretary for science and technology in the Department of Commerce, is looking for a candidate with experience in scientific research. It remains to be seen whether anybody of note will be interested in taking the job in view of the rapidly dwindling support for solar energy.—*Colin Norman*

Administration Set to Assist Hazardous Product Exports

If one is doing something bad, it is best not to advertise it. This simple lesson lies at the heart of a policy drafted by the Reagan Administration on the export of hazardous products from the United States to other nations. The policy, apparently nearing approval at the Departments of State and Commerce, would eliminate requirements that the United States notify other countries when they are about to receive a shipment of hazardous products that are barred for U.S. domestic use, thereby insulating such shipments from the embarrassing glare of public attention.

A draft of the policy dated 27 August declares that export notifications involving such hazardous products as chemicals and insecticides "have imposed a regulatory burden on industry and on the government for which little benefit can be identified." Notices of specific exports "may prejudicially direct attention to them." This attention places exporters at a competitive disadvantage and jeopardizes U.S. trade interests, the draft states.

Consequently, the Administration will seek appropriate changes in laws governing the export of toxic chemicals, unregistered pesticides, unap-

proved medical devices, and unapproved electrical products that emit hazardous amounts of radiation. Five other laws affecting exports of consumer products, flammable fabrics, meat, poultry, and biological agents do not need revision because they provide for notifications of other governments "without giving unnecessarily widespread publicity to any given export," the policy states.

At present, the Environmental Protection Agency notifies foreign governments of the first shipment each year of a particular unapproved toxic chemical, and thereafter spares exporting firms the embarrassment of identification with any one shipment. About 180 such notices were issued last year. But even this modest disclosure has been vigorously protested by the Chemical Manufacturers Association. Similarly, the National Agricultural Chemicals Association has tried to stymie a requirement that purchasers of pesticides banned or never approved in the United States sign a statement affirming their awareness of the U.S. action. About 200 such statements have been received by EPA so far this year. And the manufacturers of unapproved medical devices have objected to public notice of their 20 to 30 exports each month.

One of the reasons for their objections, according to the draft, is that specific export notices rarely influence other governments while requiring too much effort by the shipper. Lack of action by others "is not surprising since notices of specific exports do not provide sufficient information for evaluation, particularly in developing countries with limited scientific capability," the draft admits. S. Jacob Scherr, of the Natural Resources Defense Council says that other countries have indeed responded to the notices, but that when they have not it is only because too little—and not too much—information is supplied.

Language in the draft indicates that the Commerce Department and the State Department are partly at odds over how the export controls should be reformed. Officials at both agencies apparently agree that brief summaries of U.S. regulatory actions against hazardous substances should be distributed, but State Department officials want the summaries to go to individual governments and Commerce officials want them to go to an