

EPA used the same logic to reach a different conclusion. Russell Train, then EPA's administrator, concluded in a heptachlor suspension notice that "although any single component of human exposure may not appear to be significant, it alone poses a cancer hazard to certain of the more susceptible individuals and together with the several other components of human exposure poses a serious cancer threat." This view apparently no longer prevails in the federal government.

In his letter to FDA, Johnson said that it may be appropriate to lower the exposure limit "as heptachlor epoxide residues continue to decline in Hawaii cattle and their milk"; in other words, when local dairies would not suffer adverse financial impact. Asked about this, Johnson says that it was only his preliminary view, and that the whole affair is still under review.

—R. Jeffrey Smith

Guatemalan Doctor Set Free

A well-known Guatemalan physician seized by his government on 24 June was released on 29 July into the hands of the International Red Cross shortly after a privately sponsored three-man mission traveled to Guatemala to look into the case.

Juan Jose Hurtado, a 56-year-old pediatrician and anthropologist had been running a rural medical clinic since the 1976 earthquake, which displaced many of Guatemala's Indian population. Hurtado worked with the many relief groups that came to the country and trained foreign health workers. He was abducted in front of his clinic, the subject of government allegations that he had been involved in supporting Communist guerrillas. Prevailing theory among observers was that he was seized as a possible hostage to exchange for the son of the Interior Minister who had been kidnapped by guerrillas the day before.

At any rate, a group of professional associations, coordinated by the AAAS clearing house on science and human rights, got together and dispatched a three-man mission to Guatemala City. Sponsors included the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences which has

made its political debut in this arena with the recent formation of a committee on scientific freedom and human rights. The mission, comprised of Robert Hinshaw of Bethel College in Kansas, Jonathan Fine of Physicians for Social Responsibility, and Juan Mendez of Americas Watch Committee, met with various Guatemalan officials amidst considerable local press coverage. Hurtado was released 2 days after their return home and was expected within days to emigrate to the United States with his wife and daughter. Hurtado is one of the few persons in Guatemala in recent years whose disappearance following abduction by the government has not been permanent.

—Constance Holden

Small Power Producers Look to Congress for Help

Solar energy enthusiasts, who have not had much to cheer about lately, are hoping for a boost from Congress before it adjourns for the year in October. Legislation that would require utilities to buy power from small producers and cogenerators at relatively high prices is nearing a vote in committees in the House and Senate. The bills are being vigorously opposed by several utility companies, however, and they are hoping to keep the legislation bottled up for the rest of the congressional session.

The bills would remove some of the regulatory and financial uncertainties now facing small power producers, such as owners of windmills and small hydroelectric facilities. The uncertainties have arisen because an appeals court last January threw out key provisions of a federal law—the Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act (PURPA)—that was beginning to open up a market for small power producers and cogenerators (*Science*, 26 June 1981, p. 1479).

PURPA requires utilities to hook up to small power producers and buy electricity from them at "just and reasonable" rates. The court suit, which was brought by the American Electric Power Co. and Consolidated Edison, challenged regulations written by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to implement PURPA.

The utilities were particularly exercised by FERC's interpretation of "just and reasonable" to mean that the utilities should pay a price equivalent to whatever it would cost them to generate the electricity themselves—a so-called "full avoided cost" rate.

The appeals court in essence told FERC to go back and rewrite some of its regulations, a process that could take 2 years. The uncertainty resulting from this action is already hurting what was a flourishing business. Investors are said to be less willing to put up money until the regulatory problems are cleared up, and several projects have been put on the back burner.

Congress may, however, step in to void the court ruling. Bills introduced by Senator Gordon Humphrey (R-N.H.) and Representative Richard Ottinger (D-N.Y.) would amend PURPA by stating explicitly in the law that utilities should pay full avoided costs for electricity purchased from small producers and cogenerators. State public utility commissions would, however, have some flexibility under the legislation to set lower rates in unusual circumstances. Ottinger's bill is scheduled to be marked up by the commerce subcommittee, which he chairs, on 11 August. Humphrey is also hoping to bring his bill to a subcommittee vote at about the same time.

The Humphrey and Ottinger bills are similar in most respects, but they differ on one important point. Humphrey's version would permit utilities to set up unregulated subsidiaries for cogeneration, which would then be able to sell power to the parent company at the full price established by PURPA. This provision, which is generally opposed by alternative energy enthusiasts who are concerned that utilities will simply squeeze small cogenerators out of business, is not included in Ottinger's bill. That could be a problem if the legislation ever goes to conference committee.

Given the logjam of legislation awaiting congressional action, it is difficult to predict the prospects for these bills. "I'd say we have between a 30 and 70 percent chance of getting a bill through," says one committee staff member.

Solar power advocates are pushing hard. "These bills are a top priority for us," says Solar Lobby coordinator Richard Munson.—Colin Norman