

scientists believed that the half-life of dioxin was 1 year, but that proved to be wrong. The half-life is now estimated to be up to 10 years. Given its stability, officials may have to treat or excavate potentially thousands of tons of contaminated soil.

Paul E. des Rosiers, a leading expert at EPA on treating dioxin, indicates that few options are available. Italians at Seveso and at least one American firm successfully treated areas of contamination by subjecting them to ultraviolet light in the presence of a hydrogen donor. (The ingenious Italians used a rather

abundant hydrogen donor: olive oil.) Treatment by photolysis, however, is only effective at the surface; the contamination at Times Beach apparently extends well beneath the surface.

Des Rosiers says that incineration may prove to be the only good way to eliminate dioxin but the technology is limited to dioxin-laced liquids. Again, Times Beach loses out.

The most practical and economical method to clean up dioxin, he says, is to take the contaminated material to a certified landfill. But this solution has already proved to be fraught with political prob-

lems. Landfill disposal may also be impractical for Times Beach, given the immense amount of soil that would have to be moved.

An internal EPA document stated the need to strive for imaginative solutions. Referring to another dioxin-contaminated site in Missouri known as the Minker-Stout site, the document suggested that the area be purchased and then "should be considered for re-sale as a H.W. [hazardous waste] landfill after clean-up." Times Beach residents are unlikely to find that a satisfactory solution.

—MARJORIE SUN

Nestlé Letter Stops NIH Talk

The Nestlé Company, according to officials at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), used its clout to get NIH to drop a discussion of the infant formula dispute from a symposium on bioethics in January. Nestlé charged that the speakers were biased against industry. Several participants in the symposium saw this as a bad precedent, for they believe NIH leaders bowed to political pressure. One angry staffer said, "This decision goes to the heart of the principles of scientific freedom and open discussion."

The meeting, which began on 10 January, was a 2-day course on ethical dilemmas, part of an in-house education program called STEP, the acronym for Staff Training/Extramural Programs. It was a closed session attended only by NIH staffers. The attendees discussed in vitro fertilization, extraordinary life-sustaining techniques, and genetic screening in the workplace. But scheduled talks on the infant formula controversy were canceled at the last minute.

Nestlé at first agreed to participate, later withdrew, and finally sent a letter to Health and Human Services Secretary Richard Schweiker protesting that the symposium was "thoroughly slanted against either the administration, the infant formula industry, or both." The letter was mailed on 5 January, with copies sent to David Gergen and Edward Rollins at the White House. On 7 January, 72 hours before the meeting was to begin, the segment on infant formula was canceled.

The decision was made by Thomas Malone, deputy director of NIH, and William Raub, associate director for extramural research and training. Raub says he only wanted to postpone the meeting until an industry spokesman could be found, but this is not the message NIH staffers received. They understand that the symposium will not be held. One of the disinvited speakers, Patricia Young of the United Presbyterian Church, also says she was told the symposium has been canceled. NIH simply told her to send in a copy of her prepared speech, and she would receive an honorarium, she says.

John Mongoven, vice president of the Nestlé Coordination Center for Nutrition in Washington and author of the letter to Schweiker, says he took pen in hand simply to explain why his company had decided not to participate. The meeting was "stacked," he says. In his letter, he

criticized the choice of a "leading political activist" as one speaker. This was Edward Baer of the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility, a New York group that lobbies against the marketing of infant formula. Mongoven wrote: "Mr. Baer's credentials include no scientific or professional expertise in the field, in our opinion, and represent only a long history of anticorporate activism."

Young, who was scheduled to give the history and background of the controversy, is described in Mongoven's letter as "a non-scientist whose only significant experience is as a board member of INFAC, an anti-industry organization which has historically misrepresented the facts in this issue in general and our company's policies in particular." Mongoven enclosed an article describing Young as a "scourge of the multinationals." He ended by suggesting that NIH had replaced Reagan Administration policy with a "policy of bias against industry."

According to NIH staffers, the meeting was not intended to be a debate on infant formula, but a discussion of ethical conflicts and lessons to be learned from the 10-year controversy. Planning for the meeting began in July. Most infant formula makers declined to participate, according to the symposium's organizers. Nestlé, the sole exception, agreed to send a speaker. Then, 10 days before the event, Nestlé pulled out because no other industry speakers were appearing and because Young was giving the "overview" speech. (A talk on the government's role was to be given by John Bryant of NIH.) The sponsors, determined to salvage the event, called on Carol Adelman, an Agency for International Development official considered sympathetic to the industry's point of view, to serve in Nestlé's place. She agreed. Still annoyed, Nestlé protested to Schweiker, and the meeting was canceled.

Was the discussion censored? "I can assure you that we don't feel stifled," Raub says. "What seems to have happened is that a tentative consensus on the panel fell apart at the 11th hour. Faced with the decision of whether to go ahead with a flawed configuration of speakers or to eliminate that one element [on infant formula], it seemed best to defer that element until later." Now, he says, NIH is trying to decide whether it makes sense to reassemble the entire group to include the discussion of infant formula, one of four ethical cases examined.—ELIOT MARSHALL