

Robert M. White to Head Academy of Engineering

Robert M. White, a familiar figure in the upper regions of U.S. and international science for two decades, is returning to a full-time Washington post as president of the National Academy of Engineering (NAE). White has been elected sixth president of the NAE and will serve as chief executive of the 1200 member organization succeeding Courtland D. Perkins, who has been president since 1975.

White, 60, comes to NAE from the presidency of University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR), a consortium of 50 universities that operates the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado.

White was appointed chief of the U.S. Weather Bureau in 1963 and in 1970 became first administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). He resigned from NOAA in 1977 and spent 3 years at the National Research Council, the research arm of the National Academy of Sciences—National Academy of Engineering, before assuming the presidency of UCAR in 1980.

—JOHN WALSH

Metrically, the U.S. Doesn't Measure Up

What do Brunei, Burma, North and South Yemen, and the United States have in common? They are the only countries that have not made the metric system their official system of measure.

Creeping metrication still describes progress toward use of metric measure in this country, although the pace of change seems to have quickened significantly in the last decade. Large corporations now tend to be following plans to phase in metrics and about 37 states mandate metric education in the schools, although most apparently still give primary place to traditional units of measure.

Advocates of metrication are still unhappy with the federal government's stance on the issue. The Met-

ric Conversion Act of 1975 did not actually mandate conversion, but rather blessed a voluntary approach and spurred a few encouraging gestures such as the Solomon-like decision to give temperature readings in government weather reports in both centigrade and Fahrenheit.

The Reagan Administration is currently making changes in the government structures dealing with metric conversion, which on their face, appear to be a step backward or at least sideward. The U.S. Metric Board established by the 1975 law is being replaced by an Office of Metric Programs in the Department of Commerce. The office will have lower visibility and a substantially smaller budget.

Some proponents of metric conversion, however, say the change could be beneficial. A spokesman for the American National Metric Council (ANMC), for example, says that the board's independent status put it outside the bureaucratic mainstream and the new office lodged in Commerce could be more effective as an advocate of metric usage by federal agencies.

The ANMC, an industry-sponsored nonprofit organization devoted to the cause of metric conversion, reflects the industry view that a gradualist strategy is the best one because of the high cost of an abrupt change-over. "Metric transition" is now the preferred term rather than "metric conversion," which implies precipitate change, or "metrication," which is regarded as too fancy.

The trade disadvantages arising from the United States being odd man out in a metric world, however, are causing increasing concern. At House Science and Technology subcommittee hearings on 23 March, for example, Commerce Department assistant secretary D. Bruce Merrifield noted that "One barrier to effective use of U.S. developed technology is the lack of uniformity of our system of measurement with the system prevailing in the rest of the world."

At the same hearing, a spokesman for the ANMC argued that the government's present passive policy wasn't good enough and urged Congress to "work with the private sector towards ending the seemingly endless debate. Sitting on the metric fence indefinitely is unproductive and costly."

—JOHN WALSH

German Science Minister Kept on by Government

The West German federal minister for research and technology, Heinz Riesenhuber, has been reappointed to his position by Chancellor Helmut Kohl following the success of Kohl's Christian Democratic party in the general elections held on 6 March.

There had been speculation that Riesenhuber, a professional chemist by training, might be appointed to head a new environment super ministry which would be formed to respond to the political challenge of the Green party. The Greens entered the German Parliament for the first time, having obtained more than 5 percent of the national vote. However, it appears that responsibility for environmental issues will remain split between several different ministries, the largest part staying with the Ministry of the Interior.—DAVID DICKSON

More Fallout at EPA

Following the footsteps of their former boss, Anne McGill Burford, five more top officials at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have resigned. The resignations give newly appointed Administrator William D. Ruckelshaus a clean slate to work with as the White House seeks to repair the political damage wrought by the furor over EPA.

The officials who stepped down are John Hernandez, Jr., acting administrator; Robert Perry, general counsel; John Todhunter, assistant administrator; John Daniel, chief of staff; and Paul Cahill, director of the Office of Federal Activities.

Hernandez, in particular, had hoped to remain in power at EPA but became a political liability to the Administration almost immediately after Burford resigned. Charges of unethical conduct arose because of his involvement with Dow Chemical Company over an agency report on dioxin.

No date for Senate confirmation hearings on Ruckelshaus' appointment has been set as yet.—MARJORIE SUN