

routes and border crossings be designated; and that heavy prison sentences be imposed on the producers or transporters of wastes who ignore the rules.

Keen to respond to growing public demands for tighter toxic waste legislation which existed before but was strongly firmed by the dioxin controversy, Eu-

rope's environment ministers are expected to move toward the French demands. In practice, this would involve introducing complementary legislation in each of the ten EEC countries. Meanwhile, the Italian government is still faced with the problem of how to dispose of the remaining contaminated equipment at the

Seveso factory. Its courts recently began to consider charges against the managers of the factory, whose trial began, ironically, within only a few days of the story about the disappearance of the dioxin wastes emerging into the headlines of the European press.

—DAVID DICKSON

## NSF, Do You Take NBS . . . ?

The Reagan Administration has proposed that the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Bureau of Standards (NBS) be merged into a single agency. The proposal, which came out of the blue as part of a plan to reorganize the Department of Commerce, is likely to rekindle a long-standing debate about the organization of the federal government's scientific bureaucracy. The White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), for example, has for some time been quietly looking into the possibility of merging several agencies and programs into one Cabinet-level department of science.

The proposal to link NSF and NBS was apparently put together hastily. No details have yet been worked out for how the two very different organizations would be brought under a single umbrella. What seems to have happened is that NBS could not easily be fitted into a revamped Commerce Department, and because it is not sufficiently large or robust to stand on its own, a new home had to be found. NSF seemed like a convenient partner.

The merger plan was announced on 1 June as part of a proposal to establish a Department of International Trade and Industry by bringing together most of the economic and business functions of the current Department of Commerce and the responsibilities of the White House Office of the United States Trade Representative. Included in the new department would be the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and the Patent and Trademark Office.

The idea is to create a single, powerful department incorporating all the federal government's responsibilities for industry and international trade. The proposal invites comparison with Japan's mighty Ministry of International Trade and Industry, but the new department is unlikely to follow in MITI's footsteps by orchestrating domestic industrial policy—at least while the Reagan Administration is in office.

Several existing Commerce Department agencies could not be slotted into this new entity. They include the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). With a budget of some \$850 million and a diverse range of functions, NOAA was deemed strong enough to exist on its own; it would be established as a separate agency. Less certain is what would happen to the Bureau of the Census. The Administration has announced that it would not be part of the new department, but says it has not yet decided where to put it. A decision will be made shortly.

As for the plan to merge NBS and NSF, a White House statement simply says that the two agencies will be "mutually supporting, since NBS has strong in-house scientific and engineering capacity and the NSF has strong programs

of support for research by universities and scientific laboratories." In other words, they are utterly different.

Exactly how the Administration plans to arrange the merger will not be known until detailed legislation is sent to Congress, and that may not happen for several weeks. As a practical matter, a change will be required in NSF's charter because it is currently prohibited from operating laboratories, which is NBS's main business.

The legislation to create the Department of International Trade and Industry faces a bumpy ride through Congress since it cuts across the jurisdictions of several committees. Some congressional staff members speculate, however, that the proposal to merge NSF and NBS may be separated from the main proposal, which could enhance the prospects of the merger.

In any case, the Administration's proposal is likely to provide a vehicle for a broader debate about the federal government's bureaucratic arrangements for supporting science and technology, and it could breathe new life into proposals that have been floating around for several years.

One such proposal, long touted by Representative George Brown (D-Calif.), is to establish a National Technology Foundation as a technological counterpart to NSF. The plan would be to combine into a single agency the NBS, the Patent Office, the National Technical Information Service, and the applied science programs of NSF. The proposal has been the subject of hearings by the House Committee on Science and Technology and is said to have generated interest among some key House Democrats. "We will be watching the debate over the Administration's proposals to see if we can get some of our goals through," says an aide to Brown.

Beyond that, there is the possibility of establishing a department of science by merging several existing agencies and programs into a Cabinet-level department. George A. Keyworth, President Reagan's science adviser, and some of his senior aides in OSTP began a study of such a proposal several weeks ago, according to reliable sources. The idea would be to create a department by pulling together NSF, NBS, NOAA, the basic science programs of the Department of Energy, and perhaps other civilian science programs. (The National Institutes of Health would not be included.) Asked where the OSTP study now stands, in the light of the proposal to merge just NSF and NBS, an OSTP spokesman said "I just have nothing to say about that."

Whether anything will actually happen as a result of all this remains to be seen. It is perhaps worth noting that the Administration came in with bold plans to scrap the departments of Energy and Education. So far, they remain intact.—COLIN NORMAN