

interstate compact, and in the meantime it is pushing ahead with a site of its own. In congressional testimony late last year, Joseph Ward, chief of California's radiological health branch, even announced that California might be willing to make its site a regional facility for the entire western states. So far, that suggestion has been greeted with near total silence—even, surprisingly, from California voters.

California may be wise to seek part-

ners for its waste facility, because there is a great deal of legal uncertainty over an individual state's right to exclude wastes from elsewhere. The attempt by Washington voters in 1980 to exclude out-of-state wastes, for example, was struck down by the courts because it violated interstate commerce laws. Thus, states that decide to build facilities exclusively for their own use could well find themselves de facto regional dump sites. Multistate compacts, on the other

hand, can exclude wastes from nonmembers because Congress specifically gave them that right.

The 1980 low-level waste legislation has thus generated considerable activity at the state level, but there is a good deal of uncertainty about what will happen after the 1986 deadline. The expectation is that states outside the Northwest and Southeast will negotiate interim arrangements to continue dumping their wastes at Hanford and Barnwell until their own regional or individual facilities are in operation.

The Northwest and Southeast compacts do, indeed, provide for disposal of wastes from nonmembers if two-thirds of the compact members agree. But in congressional testimony last year, officials from the two regions indicated that approval would hinge upon how much progress other states were making in developing alternative sites. Representative Sid Morrison (R-Wash.) warned that "It is critical that we dissuade the political mentality in which state generators outside the Northwest rely on the Hanford site for post-1986 disposal and become complacent in their efforts to develop their own compacts and disposal sites. . . . We are dealing with a most sensitive issue in the eyes of Washington State citizens."

The stakes are high. As Alan Johnson, undersecretary of environmental affairs in Massachusetts, said at the same hearing, "in the event Massachusetts cannot come to a resolution (of the low-level waste disposal problem), a physician working at Massachusetts General Hospital can just as easily move to Houston's Methodist Hospital, or the New England Nuclear Company could just as easily be named the Golden Triangle Nuclear Company and move to North Carolina."

Congress, however, will not sit back and watch major disruptions take place because of the 1986 deadline. The legislation requires regional compacts to be approved by Congress before they have the force of federal law. (The Northwest, Southeast, Rocky Mountain, and Central States compacts have already been submitted for congressional approval, and the Midwest and Northeast compacts are expected to be submitted this year.) Congress thus has some leverage to ensure that interim arrangements are worked out. "We will probably sit on the compact agreements until some of these issues are resolved," predicts one congressional staff member. There will clearly be some intensive politicking as the deadline approaches.

—COLIN NORMAN

The Synthetic Fuels End Game

The Synthetic Fuels Corporation (SFC) is not about to go out of business, says its chairman, Edward E. Noble. He met with reporters on 5 January after a board meeting at which the SFC's directors discussed the prospects for 1984 and established a schedule for the coming year. Contrary to some published reports, the SFC has not decided to cut back the funds to be awarded (about \$14 billion), nor has it any plan for ending its granting authority this year. However, the official schedule does suggest that the corporation may have little to do after 1984 beyond monitoring projects now in the pipeline.

At the 5 January press conference, SFC officials confirmed that a controversial board member, Robert A. G. Monks, is leaving to take a post at the Department of Labor. He has clashed with Noble over the way the synthetic fuels program is being run. Monks favored a more generous approach to funding and is seen as a supporter of the bailout appeal of the Great Plains Gasification Project (*Science*, 23 December, p. 1305). Noble at first opposed giving this project a price guarantee but in December agreed to reconsider. Although Monks reportedly hoped to stay on the SFC board while serving at the Labor Department, the SFC's bylaws made it difficult for him to hold both positions. His resignation from the SFC, effective 6 January, is likely to be accepted.

The SFC's goal for 1984, Noble said, "is to assist about a dozen projects which represent a diversity of resources and technologies, establish an industry and environmental infrastructure, and develop the management and manufacturing capability to assure this country that synthetic fuels will be available when we need them." The aim will be, first, to develop worthy coal and tar sands projects, and, second, to support more experimental oil shale recovery processes. Noble said that the SFC board had not set any target for the amount of money to be committed. "Things change so much from day to day," he added, that it is impossible to guess how much the corporation will give out in 1984.

The SFC's new calendar makes room for an accelerated review of the Great Plains bailout request, in the form of a special solicitation for large coal gasification ventures. The deadline for awarding a contract is set for August. In other areas, the SFC hopes to sign final contracts by June supporting two small heavy-oil plants in California and a peat-to-methanol scheme in North Carolina. The latter is opposed by local fishermen and environmentalists, who are suing to halt the project on grounds that it will damage North Carolina's wetlands and fish breeding areas. In July, the corporation aims to sign agreements with two large oil shale ventures in Colorado and a smaller and riskier shale project in Utah. The ambitious schedule also calls for the agency to close deals in all other categories: eastern coal gasification, Gulf Coast lignite gasification, and modification of old plants to use coal-water mixtures or synthetic coal products. In addition, the SFC plans a catch-all "general solicitation" ending in April to bring in any ideas that may have been ignored earlier. Agreements in this category are supposed to be signed in November, and the latest scheduled awards are to be made in early 1985.—ELIOT MARSHALL