

## EPA Moves Tentatively on Two Air Pollutants

On 23 September the Environmental Protection Agency announced that it intends to classify ethylene oxide and chloroform as air pollutants that pose health risks. The decision, according to EPA, is in keeping with a pledge made 2 years ago to speed up the review of potentially hazardous air pollutants. But some critics say EPA is fudging because other air contaminants are not being regulated.

In 1983, under pressure from Congress, former EPA administrator William Ruckelshaus pledged that EPA would decide "the need for regulation" concerning two dozen chemicals by the end of this year. The agency has now sorted through almost the whole list and concluded that several of the compounds are not a health risk. It has listed only one of them, coke oven emissions, as hazardous. But, EPA says, it intends to list seven others, including ethylene oxide and chloroform.

But intending to list a chemical has a far different regulatory meaning than actually listing a compound. Once EPA actually lists a chemical, it must issue a final standard within a year. But EPA has created this new category—the "intention-to-list" list—and asserts it can take up to 4 years to act. And although an intention to list triggers actions leading to a "probable [regulatory] proposal," it also leaves open the possibility that EPA might not regulate the chemical. Other chemicals that fall under this category are chromium and carbon tetrachloride. Three other chemicals will soon be added—1,3 butadiene, methylene chloride, and cadmium.

David Doniger, of the Natural Resources Defense Council, contends that EPA, in order to meet the year-end deadline, is "trying to pass off a decision to intend to list as a decision to list."

EPA, for example, says ethylene oxide, a widely used sterilant, is "a probable human carcinogen that is readily absorbed through the respiratory and gastrointestinal tract." According to agency calculations, exposure to ethylene oxide from current sources increases the national incidence of cancer by 58 cases. Expo-

sure to chloroform, which EPA also says is a probable human carcinogen, results in 13 excess cancers annually in the nation.

Doniger says that NRDC has given notice to the agency that it plans to challenge the agency's creation of the intent-to-list category. NRDC has already filed several suits against EPA over its interpretation of the Clean Air Act. Rice of EPA said, however, that the agency believes it "has hustled" to fulfill its promise. "EPA feels that its efforts meet that commitment," he said.—**MARJORIE SUN**

## China to Permit Inspection of Some Nuclear Facilities

China's deputy nuclear minister, Zhao Ping, surprised attendees at the meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency when he announced that his country will open civilian nuclear sites to inspection by the IAEA. Speaking in Vienna on 24 September, Zhao said that his government had decided to place "some of its civilian nuclear installations" under IAEA safeguards, in an arrangement to be settled with the agency "at an appropriate time."

It is not yet clear what facilities will be covered, for China has no truly civilian nuclear plants. Nor is it known when the inspection program might begin.

Although the pledge to cooperate with the IAEA thus remains vague, it is welcome. One State Department official called it a "significant step." A little over a decade ago, the Chinese leadership described the spread of nuclear weapons in favorable terms, viewing it as a force for liberating the poorer nations. China joined the IAEA only 20 months ago, and it is beginning to show signs that it intends to give substantial cooperation to the IAEA's scheme for controlling nuclear materials.

China's announcement could have some influence on Congress, which is reviewing a White House plan to allow nuclear exports to Beijing. China wants to buy civil nuclear systems from the United States, Europe, and Japan (*Science*, 27 September, p. 1372). But trade with U.S. suppliers has been held in check for nearly 2

years because of China's noncooperation with the IAEA. This seemed to present a legal barrier. Now the White House says the Chinese have proved their good faith, and trade should go forward once Congress has given its blessing. But some members say Congress should not go along.

In particular, Representative Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), chairman of the House energy conservation and power subcommittee, has argued against the trade plan on grounds that the U.S. Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act (1978) specifically bars the transfer of nuclear goods to nations that reject IAEA safeguards. Markey's staffer, William Manning, says China's announcement should not change the argument. China still has not agreed to allow safeguards specifically on U.S. nuclear imports, Manning says. In addition, he says the wording of the U.S.-China agreement is inadequate in its handling of China's rights to reprocess U.S. fuel. (It fails to require explicit, prior U.S. approval.) In the Senate, both liberal and conservative opponents of the Chinese agreement (whose numbers are few) say the announcement will not change the debate. An aide to Senator William Proxmire (D-Wisc.) says, "We had been told to expect this. We would have been shocked if it hadn't happened."—**ELIOT MARSHALL**

## Comings and Goings

**Samuel O. Thier** has been appointed president of the Institute of Medicine, succeeding **Frederick C. Robbins**, who is retiring after a 5-year term in office. Thier, who has been chairman of medicine at Yale for more than 10 years, will be in Washington full-time by January.

**Bernadine Healy**, deputy director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, has left Washington for Ohio where she becomes director of research at the Cleveland Clinic. Healy was responsible for biomedical issues while at OSTP.

**Edward E. David** is leaving the Exxon Research and Engineering Company where he has been president since 1977. The former White House science adviser has not yet decided where he will go next.