

Briefing:

States Seek Remand of EPA Waste Regs

The Environmental Protection Agency's long-delayed standards for regulating radioactive emissions from high-level nuclear waste sites are being challenged by the Natural Resources Defense Council. The 50,000-member national organization, two other environmental groups, and four states have petitioned U.S. courts of appeals in

from natural background, medical, fallout, and nuclear power plant sources.

Environmental groups also say that the agency's "special source" provision fails to protect water resources that have yet to be tapped as a major source of drinking water. As David Berrick, an attorney with the Environmental Policy Institute, reads the agency's rules, water resources in the vicinity of waste storage facilities could become contaminated to unacceptable levels, if they are not being used by "thousands of persons" at the time DOE chooses a site location. One



EPA's rules apply to storage locations for high-level wastes and to future repositories, one of which might be located at these candidate sites.

Boston, New York, New Orleans, and St. Louis to order that the rules be redrafted.

NRDC contends the regulations, which were issued on 19 September, fail to adequately protect ground-water resources and the public from contamination stemming from the storage and disposal of radioactive wastes originating from defense, research, and nuclear power activities. The Department of Energy is planning to construct two repositories that would each store 70,000 metric tons of civilian and military high-level wastes. Sites are being examined in five western states and 17 eastern and midwestern states.

NRDC attorney Dan Reicher says a provision giving the agency administrator the option to set an alternative standard at certain waste management facilities appears to be arbitrary. It would permit incremental public exposure equivalent to a 100-millirem annual dose and an infrequent exposure equivalent to 500 millirems annually, excluding background and medical procedures. When the optional authority is not exercised, the general public residing in the vicinity of such facilities could have an incremental whole-body exposure of 25 millirems and an exposure of 75 millirems to any critical organ. On average, Americans annually receive 50 to 150 millirems of radiation

EPA official conceded privately that the agency's failure to provide equal protection for untrapped sources of drinking water may be hard to defend.

The environmental groups and states, which have yet to file briefs with the courts, also are expected to argue that EPA's rules lack adequate enforcement provisions, are inconsistent with Nuclear Regulatory Commission regulations, and fail to address the effects of alternative disposal methods such as underground injection. ■

MARK CRAWFORD

End of the Line for Synfuels Corporation

Nearly 6 years after Congress set up the U.S. Synthetic Fuels Corporation to develop a broad spectrum of technologies to produce gas and liquids, the quasi-federal operation is going out of business. Wracked by charges of mismanagement and paralyzed for a period by the lack of an operating quorum on the board of directors, the corporation committed just \$1.3 billion of its original \$14.9 billion in spending authority.

For a dozen companies that have been pressing the corporation for action during the past several months, time has run out. The continuing resolution, a catchall appropriations bill for unfunded federal programs, was signed by President Reagan 19 December, and it phases out the corporation within 120 days. The corporation's board of directors is slated to be dissolved within 90 days and is explicitly prohibited from making any further awards of loan or price guarantees.

All but \$400 million of SFC's program authority was to be rescinded. The remainder will be used to fund research on advanced coal-combustion and cleanup technologies, providing \$100 million in fiscal year 1986, and \$150 million in each of the following 2 years. The Department of Treasury has been appointed the task of monitoring the activities of projects that received SFC loan and price guarantees.

The largest beneficiary of SFC assistance is Dow Chemical Company's synthetic gas project at Plaquemine, Louisiana, which has \$620 million in price guarantees. Union Oil Company has SFC price guarantees of \$500 million for production of jet fuel from Colorado oil shale. Another \$120 million was awarded to a consortium of companies led by Southern California Edison Company for the Cool Water combined-cycle coal-gasification plant near Daggett, California. And Greenwich Oil Company recently landed \$60 million in loan and price guarantees for production of heavy oil at its Forest Hill project in Wood County, Texas. ■

MARK CRAWFORD

Dinosaurs Ruffle Some Feathers in California

Scientists in California who lobbied for a sophisticated (not to mention accurate) treatment of evolution in schoolbooks won a victory last September. The Board of Education rejected all the 7th and 8th grade science texts submitted for review, asking that publishers sharpen the parts dealing with evolution. Now the changes are in, and those who sought them are disappointed. In some cases the "improvements" are as bad as or worse than the original language, several critics say.

Nevertheless, the Board of Education voted on 12 December to accept them. These books will not come up for review again in California for another 5 years. Meanwhile, the board moves on to inspect math, history, and literature texts, which also are said