Briefing:

DOD Proposes Rules for Reviewing Scientific Papers

The Department of Defense has proposed a set of rules for clearing research papers for presentation at scientific meetings. The new rules, which apply to papers derived from research performed in DOD labs or under contract to the department, have been given a mixed review by scientific organizations.

Although it is generally agreed that the rules would virtually eliminate the problem of papers being pulled from scientific conferences at the last moment—a problem that has caused chaos at some meetings—there is concern that they could lead to further efforts to require that some unclassified papers be presented only in special export-controlled sessions. Many scientific societies have resolutely refused to hold such sessions.

The new rules, which were published in the 12 February *Federal Register*, require that papers or abstracts by DOD employees be cleared before they are submitted for inclusion in the program of a scientific meeting. Contractees would also be required to go through the clearance procedure if the contract specifically requires it.

The major new feature of the rules is that DOD must meet tight deadlines in conducting its reviews. It is required to review all abstracts within 10 working days. Papers scheduled for open sessions must be reviewed within 20 working days, and all other papers must be cleared in 30 working days. This should eliminate last-minute decisions resulting in withdrawal of scheduled papers.

The review will determine whether the papers can be presented in open sessions or whether the audience for them must be restricted. At one extreme, DOD may elect to classify the material, in which case the paper could only be presented in a classified meeting on government premises. Scientific societies do not generally sponsor classified sessions.

DOD can, however, decide to place restrictions on unclassified papers if it beleives that they contain material that falls under export control regulations. In that case, attendance would be limited to authorized individuals who would have to agree not to divulge the information to non-U.S. citizens. The new rules require societies to police access to such sessions. Last year, however, the leaders of 12 scientific societies signed a statement saying they "will not be responsible for, nor will they sponsor" restricted or closed sessions.

The new rules reiterate Administration policy that restrictions will not normally be placed on the publication of unclassified research performed on university campuses. However, the rules note that some U.S. laws "may restrict release of information, and such restrictions will be imposed" on university research when required. DOD will only be able to insist on such restrictions if that right is specified in the contract governing the research, however.

The new rules are open for public comment until 14 March and will be implemented soon thereafter. ■ COLIN NORMAN

UN Biotechnology Center Mired in Politics

The United Nations biotechnology program is limping along, apparently hamstrung by political divisions among developing countries and lack of financial support. Most recently, member nations were supposed to select the program's first scientific director in January, but then postponed a decision because of disagreement.

The program has been proceeding in fits and starts ever since it was first conceived 3 years ago. Formed under the auspices of the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the program is designed to promote the transfer of genetic engineering technology from advanced countries to developing countries. But the United States, Japan, and other leaders in biotechnology have shown little or no interest in supporting the project.

In 1984, after enormous wrangling, members of the program, which are all developing nations, voted to headquarter the project at two research centers, one in Trieste, Italy, the other in New Delhi. The Trieste center will focus on genetic engineering related to the production of industrial commodities and pharmaceuticals, and the New Delhi laboratory will work on applications related to agriculture and animal and human health, especially vaccines. Construction of laboratories at Trieste is under way, but the Indian government will not put up the money for facilities in New Delhi until a scientific director is named.

Burke Zimmerman recently returned to the United States after serving as coordinator to set up the biotech program and says he was frustrated by the whole experience. Zimmerman, who was formerly at Cetus Corporation and a top policy analyst at the National Institutes of Health, says, "It's difficult to see where the program is going. The real problem is that it needs a top scientist in charge, but the politicians want control. The [UNIDO] system is so bureaucratic, so political, and so cumbersome, it's turning off most scientists."

The process of selecting a program director illustrates some of the difficulties. The 36 participating nations decided that only they could nominate candidates for the position. Scientists from Italy and India were excluded from consideration because the countries are hosts to the centers. A list of a dozen names was developed and then sent to the program's scientific advisory panel for recommendations. The panel includes Joshua Lederberg of Rockefeller University, Robert Haselkorn of the University of Chicago, Ananda Chakrabarty of the University of Illinois Medical Center, Ray Wu of Cornell University, Arthur Kornberg of Stanford University, and Jonas Salk of the Salk Institute for Biological Studies.

The advisory panel concluded that only one of the candidates was scientifically qualified and that person was Fotis Kafatos, a molecular biologist at Harvard University. Kafatos in 1983 helped the Greek government to establish a $2-million biotechnology center in Crete. When it came time to vote for Kafatos, however, some developing countries wanted more evidence that he was interested in helping the Third World, Chakrabarty and Wu said in separate interviews. Chakrabarty said that "there were some questions [among the developing countries] about why they should take somebody from Harvard."

Kafatos then withdrew his name from consideration on the advice of the board because there was not sure support for him and funding for the program was still shaky. "I didn't want to spend a lot of time fundraising," Kafatos said. "The program in concept is an excellent idea, but it has not been adequately planned."

Although the director's annual salary would be $80,000 to $90,000, the program itself only has enough funding for 2 years. To attract top researchers, more stability in funding is needed, Chakrabarty and Wu said. Wu also noted that funding for the program is based on voluntary contributions from developing countries. In 1983, members rejected a proposal to require payment from participating nations.

Member nations have agreed now to broaden the search for a director and will advertise the job opening, which they did not do earlier. The advisory board has recommended that they select a candidate without regard to country of origin. The members may vote on a director in May. ■

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