anybody should be grateful that [AIDS] took the least cut." Included in the proposed rescission is $16 million for a new program to fund demonstration projects to provide health care to AIDS patients, a program that Weicker himself sponsored.

Most of the funds will thus eventually come through—although the Gramm-Rudman cut will probably stick—but senior NIH officials are concerned about the impact of the funding uncertainties. NIH was due to receive $140 million for AIDS research, but the Gramm-Rudman cut removed $6 million and the Administration's proposed rescission would slice off another $14 million.

These cuts would be made in a $70-million block of money that NIH director James B. Wyngaarden is to distribute among NIH programs. In effect, Congress gave NIH considerable flexibility in determining its spending priorities. NIH was supposed to provide Congress with a plan for distributing the funds, but the plan has not yet been transmitted because of uncertainties over how much will eventually be available. Thus, NIH researchers and grantees still do not know how much they are likely to be able to spend in the fiscal year that is already almost halfway through.

Walter Dowdle

Coordinating AIDS programs in the Department of Health and Human Services.

Uncertainty over funding is only one problem that NIH has with the Administration's AIDS proposals. Next year, all AIDS funds will be channeled through an office in the Department of Health and Human Services. The idea is to provide central management and direction of the department's AIDS programs, and the assumption is that coordination will be more effective if the coordinator holds the purse strings. NIH officials are wary, however, that the scheme will add a layer of bureaucracy in AIDS research and exacerbate interagency rivalries over funding.

Asked by Weicker at appropriations hearings last week whether he approves of this arrangement, Wyngaarden gave a guarded response. Noting that there is already "excellent coordination," he said "I do not see this as deterring the coordination."

In fact, coordination of the AIDS effort has improved recently with the appointment of a full-time coordinator in the office of the assistant secretary of health. The job is being filled temporarily by Walter Dowdle, the deputy director of the Centers for Disease Control. Dowdle, who assumed the position on 1 January, initially said he would stay for 90 days. ■ COLIN NORMAN

Fletcher Nominated as New NASA Chief

James C. Fletcher, an engineer who served as administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) under two presidents in the 1970's, has been asked to return to that post by President Reagan. The announcement of his nomination was released by the White House on 6 March.

If confirmed, Fletcher will succeed James Beggs, who went on temporary leave last December after an indictment on criminal charges stemming from his tenure as a senior executive of General Dynamics. The nomination is intended to end a bitter battle between employees allied with Beggs and with deputy administrator William Graham, who had sharply different management styles.

Fletcher, who was present at the space shuttle's creation and steered it through some turbulent years, was reportedly not enthusiastic about returning to Washington, but succumbed to considerable White House pressure. He is presently a professor at the University of Pittsburgh, and serves on the scientific advisory panel to the Pentagon's Strategic Defense Initiative Office.

Fletcher, 66, has spent most of his life in the aerospace business. During his first stint at NASA, he promoted the shuttle as an efficient and cost-effective means of gaining routine access to space, and scaled it back substantially so as to meet congressional budget pressures. A study of shuttle cost and performance completed during his tenure, widely known as the "Mathematica" study, attracted considerable scientific controversy. It projected total program costs of $5 to $8 billion (in 1972 dollars) and more than 700 flights in the first 12 years. Actual costs have been more than $20 billion.

Fletcher received a doctoral degree in physics from Caltech in 1948 and joined the Hughes Aircraft Corporation. From 1964 to 1971 he served as president of the University of Utah. ■ R. JEFFREY SMITH

Formaldehyde Poses Little Risk, Study Says

For years, scientists have generally agreed that formaldehyde is a potential human carcinogen based on the results of animal studies. Now a major epidemiological study by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) says that there is "little evidence" that workers exposed to low levels of the chemical have a higher cancer risk than the general population. The findings are sure to play a role in current deliberations by the federal government to change worker exposure standards.

The NCI study is the largest survey of workers exposed to formaldehyde, a widely used industrial chemical. The research team, headed by Aaron Blair, NCI's chief of occupational studies, examined the mortality data of 26,561 people who worked in ten different industries between 1938 and 1965. The study included companies producing formaldehyde itself, resins, film, plywood, and plastics.

The scientists reported a "slightly" higher incidence of cancers of the lung and prostate and of Hodgkin's disease. The number of lung cancer cases was 30 percent higher than expected among workers based on a latency period of 20 years since they were first exposed. But the researchers said there is no correlation because the incidence did not correspond to the workers' exposure levels. Exposure data were generated from actual measurements from factories and calculations based on this information. Before the mid-1970's, sampling of formaldehyde levels were rarely recorded.

Two scientists outside NCI interpreted the results differently. Peter Infante, an epidemiologist at the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) said that the increase in lung cancer is cause for concern because the difference is statistically significant. The lack of correlation between the higher incidence of cancers and the exposure data does not indicate there is little connection, but reflects the weakness of the exposure data, according to Infante and Frederica Perera, an assistant professor at Columbia University's School of Public Health and a consultant to the Natural Resources Defense Council. The problem is often inherent in studies tracing workers' histories over many years, they say.

Infante also noted that the majority of people studied were exposed to very low concentrations, "well below" even a proposal by OSHA that would tighten standards.

The study will be published in the next issue of the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*. The research team included industry scientists, but the study was funded entirely by NCI. ■ MARJORIE SUN