



Dusting with Pesticide

The proposal would speed up the review of hundreds of pesticides.

companies can bypass these requirements by claiming that the chemical is so similar to an existing product that further toxicity testing is not required. They make similar arguments when they want to promote a new use for an existing product. But because the old chemicals have not been fully evaluated in the first place, the gaps in safety data rarely get filled. The agreement would make it much tougher to qualify as a "me-too" chemical.

The proposal would also accelerate a special review process that EPA relies on to ban a pesticide. Under present law, EPA has taken as long as 7 years to cancel a pesticide, as in the case of ethylene dibromide (EDB). The EDB review dragged on because chemical manufacturers and the U.S. Department of Agriculture blocked a proposed ban under procedures allowed by the special review regulations. The agreement would shorten the whole process to 1 year by imposing strict deadlines on each step along the way.

For the first time, members of the public would have the right to examine health and safety data on a pesticide *before* the agency decides whether to approve it. At present, this information is only available after a pesticide is approved, but by then, it is very difficult to reverse a decision.

The bill goes a long way in addressing EPA's complaints about the pesticide law. "This is the best shot for reform in years," says Moore. Nevertheless, he objects strongly to the numerous deadlines that would be imposed on the agency. "A few things just won't work," he says. To fill in the missing toxicity information on old chemicals will take an enormous effort, more than the 6 years allotted in the bill, in his opinion. And even if reregistration fees are charged, the agency would still come up short by \$100 million to complete the review, Moore told the subcommittee on 20 March.

He also testified that EPA "was unequivocally

opposed" to the way the proposal would change the special review process. The bill does not address a basic defect in the special review process but simply compresses a flawed procedure into a shorter time span. He suggests that the right to administrative review be eliminated, which could trim years off the process. If opponents want to challenge an agency decision, then they can sue EPA, just as they can now.

Moore also opposes keeping the same requirement that triggers a special review. The agency presently only considers the hazard of a chemical to start a special review. The risk of exposure should also be taken into account, he testified. Otherwise, "we would have to begin a special review even if we already know that exposure is so low that the risk is insignificant."

Several issues that may prove to be sticking points are not addressed in the legislation. The consumer coalition wants to see regulations concerning ground water in the bill, but have not yet settled the matter with the chemical trade association. Meyerhoff also notes that "we haven't made peace yet with the farm groups."

Mark Maslyn, assistant legislative director for the American Farm Bureau Federation, says that his members are worried that the proposal might reduce the availability of specialty pesticides used for crops other than commodities. A company may choose not to register a modest-selling product because of the \$150,000 registration fee and that product may be crucial to a certain grower, Maslyn says. Steven Schatzow, director of EPA's office of pesticides, says, however, that the argument was a "red herring" because most herbicides used in small volume are made from popular active ingredients.

Maslyn would like to see the issue of product liability addressed in the pesticide reform bill. He says that under current law, a farmer can be sued if he follows a pesticide's labeling instructions. "That's not right," he says. "We want the liability to rest with the chemical companies if the chemicals were used properly." But, he adds, "We're having some trouble writing that legislative language."

Other groups outside the coalition, such as the Environmental Policy Institute, have serious reservations that the industry should win extra patent life on their products in trade for these other reforms.

The coalition and the chemical industry both acknowledge that the bill may be buffeted in Congress. But they have pledged that any changes must be mutually agreed upon. "This legislation is a delicate balance of hard choices," says Nancy Drabble, an attorney for Public Citizen's Congress Watch. ■ **MARJORIE SUN**

Briefing:

OMB Offers to Delay Indirect Cost Cuts

Facing a barrage of criticism from members of Congress, Joseph R. Wright, deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget, has offered to delay for 3 months implementation of a proposal to cap the administrative costs that universities charge as overhead on government research grants. Testifying before a subcommittee of the House Committee on Science and Technology on 20 March, Wright made clear, however, that he regards such a delay—from 1 April to 1 July—as a stay of execution; it does not signal a change of mind.

The proposal, published by OMB in the 12 February *Federal Register*, would limit the amount of administrative overhead charged by universities on government grants to 26 percent of the direct cost of doing the research. For fiscal year 1987, the ceiling would drop to 20 percent (*Science*, 7 March, p. 1059). OMB has said that the proposal would save \$100 million in FY 1986 and \$200 million in FY 1987, but some university groups contend that the cuts are likely to be much deeper than that.

In his testimony, Wright noted that indirect costs have risen faster than direct costs, growing from 24 percent of total federal support for academic R&D in 1974 to 31 percent in 1984. "This represents," he claimed, "an annual shift of over \$400 million from research to university overhead."

University administrators testified that the costs are real, and argued that if OMB's proposal were to be implemented, universities would end up subsidizing federal research programs. They were particularly chagrined, however, by the way OMB proposed the cuts.

Universities were not consulted before the proposal was published, they were given only 30 days to respond, and the cuts were scheduled to be implemented in 45 days. Asked by subcommittee chairman Doug Walgren (D-PA) to respond to this complaint, Wright pointed to a foot-thick pile of reports on indirect costs that have been produced over the years, and noted that "this was not something that just came out of the blue."

Nevertheless, said Wright, "if it would help to extend implementation from April 1 to July 1, I would be happy to do that." However, he said OMB is not willing to extend the period for universities to comment on the proposal.

University groups thus seem unlikely to force a change of heart on OMB and are

taking their complaints to Capitol Hill, where they seem to be getting a more sympathetic hearing. Senators Mark Hatfield (R-OR) and Lowell Weicker (R-CT), who occupy key spots on the Senate Appropriations Committee, have written to OMB director James Miller asking him to withdraw the proposal. And Representatives Don Fuqua (D-FL), Walgren, Manuel Lujan, Jr. (R-NM), and Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY), who sit on the House Committee on Science and Technology, have asked OMB to extend the comment period to 90 days and suspend implementation of the proposal.

Unless OMB changes its mind, the only way Congress will block the proposal will be to pass legislation forbidding the cuts. A move is, in fact, already afoot to insert language into a continuing appropriations bill that would do just that. ■

COLIN NORMAN

NSF Designates Five New Engineering Centers

The National Science Foundation has announced the selection of universities to operate five new engineering research centers. The multidisciplinary centers will receive up to \$56.3 million from NSF over the next 5 years. Additional funding is expected from industry.

The five new centers bring the total of NSF engineering research centers to 11, including the first six established by the foundation last year (*Science*, 19 April 1985, p. 305). Competition for the new centers attracted 102 proposals from 75 institutions.

The successful institutions and their centers:

- Brigham Young University and Utah State University, a joint venture; Advanced Combustion Research Engineering Center.

- Carnegie-Mellon University; Engineering Research Center for Engineering Design.

- University of Illinois-Urbana; Engineering Research Center for Compound Semiconductor Microelectronics.

- Lehigh University; Engineering Research Center on Advanced Technology for Large Structural Systems.

- Ohio State University; Engineering Research Center for Net Shape Manufacturing. (The term "net shape manufacturing" denotes processes that give manufactured parts nearly final form.)

Planned funding totals would vary among the centers from \$9.7 million to nearly \$15 million over 5 years.

The engineering research centers are in-

tended to enhance U.S. economic competitiveness by encouraging multidisciplinary research on problems relevant to industry. NSF's original plan for the program called for establishment of as many as 20 engineering research centers, with funding of up to \$100 million a year.

This year, \$23 million is earmarked for support of the centers. The Administration budget for next year requests \$35 million for the centers, enough to establish an additional four centers. ■ JOHN WALSH

House Science Committee Chairman Leaving Congress

After 24 years in the House of Representatives, Don Fuqua (D-FL) has decided to call it quits. In a surprise announcement on 14 March, Fuqua, who has chaired the House Committee on Science and Technology for the past 7 years, said he will not be running for reelection later this year.

His departure is likely to mean that the science committee chairmanship will go to Representative Robert A. Roe (D-NJ), the



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Next in line for Fuqua's job.

next most senior Democrat on the committee. Roe has been a member of the House since 1969 and has sat on the science committee ever since he was elected to Congress. He has not played a very active role in scientific affairs, however. For example, he has chosen in the past to retain chairmanship of a public works subcommittee rather than chair a science and technology subcommittee.

This has led to some speculation that Roe will not seek the chairmanship, but he announced last week that he is interested in the position. He is said to be well liked and it is unlikely that he would be successfully challenged.

The next in line after Roe is Representative George E. Brown, Jr. (D-CA), who has been a very active member of the committee. Brown, in fact, has more years of service in Congress than Roe, but he left Congress for a couple of years in the early 1970's to make an unsuccessful run for the governorship of California, which puts him behind Roe in seniority.

Fuqua has not indicated what he will do next, but he is said to be staying in Washington. At age 52, he is young enough to pursue a second career.

With major decisions looming in the next year or so on the space program and the superconducting super collider, both of which come under the purview of the Committee on Science and Technology, Fuqua is leaving at a critical time. He will, however, oversee completion of a major study of federal science policy currently being conducted by a task force he chairs. A draft of the study is expected in early June and, following another round of hearings in the summer, a final report will be produced in the fall. ■ COLIN NORMAN

NSF to Establish Computer Directorate

Computer science and applications have transformed practically every aspect of science and engineering important to the National Science Foundation, but have proved awkward to fit into the NSF table of organization. Now they are to get a home of their own in NSF in a Directorate for Computer and Information Science and Engineering.

How to give computer matters a better focus in NSF has been a topic of discussion for some time. Announcing his intention to establish the new directorate, NSF director Erich Bloch told members of the National Science Board at their 21 March meeting that he had decided to proceed with the new directorate because he had found the right person to run it.

The prospective assistant director for CISE, the inevitable acronymic, is Gordon Bell, former vice president of engineering at Digital Equipment Corporation and a computer architect of renown. Bell headed the design work in the middle 1970's that produced the VAX-11, which became the workhorse of academic computing. While at Car-