



**Glasnost and the environment:** *The effects of toxic chemical pollution near Sheksna.*

Biryukov said. The Soviet Union has a mixed track record in international cooperation, according to Western observers.

This spring, for example, it signed the Montreal Protocol on ozone. In other international accords, it has agreed to reduce sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions. The Soviets recently permitted Norwegian officials to visit the nickel smelting area, said Biryukov.

But Kenneth Rahn of the University of Rhode Island, who studies air pollution in the Arctic, says, for example, that the Soviets have consistently declined to release to Western scientists samples of Arctic air from their territory. Soviet industrial pollution accounts for about half of the air pollution in the Arctic because of meteorological circumstances, says Rahn, who participates in scientific exchanges with the Soviet Union under the auspices of EPA.

But maybe that will change under the new committee. Biryukov declares that "Everything has changed here in the approach to international cooperation. Confrontation isn't productive at all. We should start talking and doing something instead of exchanging blows and accusations. We want to do more and to suggest new areas of cooperation," including climatic changes, desertification, deforestation, tropical rain forests, and polar areas.

Sokolovskiy readily acknowledges that the committee has a tough task ahead. But one of the keys to achieving its mission, he says, is "to build close ties with the mass media and public to stress importance of environmental problems." Some protests allowed have already prompted the ouster of Soviet officials.

"I am quite optimistic," said Sokolovskiy, a former Hydromet official. "We should use glasnost and democratization to promote" environmental protection.

■ MARJORIE SUN

## NSB Ponders Science Policy Role

Seemingly prompted by the upsurge of interest in the federal science advisory system, the National Science Board has opened a cautious discussion of how it might stake out a broader science policy role for itself. What the board is mulling over now is a proposal from a three-member working group that the NSB, the policy-making body of the National Science Foundation, form a standing committee made up of members from government, industry, and academe as well as NSB to provide "impartial and informed advice" on major science and technology issues to the President and Congress.

As envisioned by the working group, the committee would draw on the expertise of NSF professionals rather than operate with a large staff. Cornell University president Frank H. T. Rhodes said the committee might provide advice, for example, on large projects such as mapping the human genome, on the science and technology implications of "post-1992 Europe," when the greater integration planned then is expected to transform the European community economically and politically, and on the question of the "long-term organization, funding, and relationships of the R&D enterprise in the United States."

A national policy role was mandated for the NSB when the foundation was chartered in 1950. The issue has been raised periodically, but the board has always backed away from seeking responsibility beyond that of guiding NSF.

At the board's 19 August meeting, Rhodes presented the working group's recommendations and said that the focus on the science advisory system had been inspired by the attention directed to it recently by National Academy of Sciences president Frank Press and others (*Science*, 4 March, p. 1082).

In addition to the proposal for an NSB advisory committee, the working group offered two other major recommendations. The first was that the post of science adviser to the President be upgraded. Elevation to cabinet rank should be considered. If it proved impractical to have a cabinet member without portfolio—that is without a department to run—the science adviser should be made a special assistant to the President, a rank that does not now go with the job.

The second recommendation was that the various congressional panels that deal with science and technology should form a joint coordinating committee to discuss their work and deal with the gaps that occur. Rhodes noted that nearly 100 House and Senate panels are engaged with science and technology matters.

Rhodes acknowledged that the NSB had little leverage besides advocating these changes and the discussion at the board meeting concentrated on the putative NSB advisory committee. Rhodes emphasized that it would be "useful" to form such an advisory panel only if there was some indication from Congress and the President that they would "find it valuable."

In its discussion of the proposal, board members raised questions about how an NSB committee would interact with the President's science adviser, officials of the National Academy of Sciences, and other players on the science advisory circuit. Concern was expressed that the advisory committee might become independent of the NSB. NSF director Erich Bloch, who also served on the work group, said that control could be assured if the NSB initiated the topics dealt with and the committee reported to the board.

The major worry, however, was that an NSB-sponsored committee might be suspected of a bias in favor of NSF. RPI president Roland Schmitt, former NSB chairman and a nominee for reappointment as a board member, asked that, when such a committee took up an issue clearly in the domain of another agency, "What does that do to the political status of NSF?"

In a meeting with reporters, NSB chairman Mary L. Good emphasized that the recommendations would be the subject of an "ongoing discussion," and offered a modest prognosis with the remark that she sees "some hopes that we can come to grips with that part of the NSF mandate."

The jurisdictional issue has been the chief reason that NSB has never bid for a bigger national policy role. In the past, the pattern when the matter came up has been for the NSB to hang its clothes on a hickory limb but not go near the water. Unless it can find a way to provide advice without prejudicing NSF's fortunes it is unlikely to take the policy plunge.

■ JOHN WALSH