

ams voted with the majority.) Specific guidelines are still being crafted. The panel is expected to meet again next month and will submit its findings to the government by 1 December.

A White House spokesman has already responded to the panel's initial finding by

saying, "The President has decided he wants to take some step to limit the use of federal funds in this area. He will weigh advice from panels but ultimately the President will decide." For the moment, a moratorium remains in place and the outcome is uncertain.

■ BARBARA J. CULLITON

China Bans Panda Loans

The Chinese government announced last week that it has suspended short-term loans of giant pandas to the United States. The move is an apparent response to mounting criticism, mostly from Western conservation groups, that the loans are jeopardizing the future of this critically endangered animal. A lawsuit earlier this year by two Western groups brought the issue to a head. The Chinese ban, which also applies to the endangered golden monkey, is temporary.

Until now the Chinese have staunchly defended the loans, which began as a goodwill gesture in 1984. They say the loans raise public awareness of the panda's plight and provide much-needed money for conservation. Only about 1000 giant pandas are left in the wild, all in the mountains of easternmost China, and 100 or so are in captivity.

But since 1984 the short-term loans have proliferated as more and more Western zoos clamor for pandas. For zoos these exhibits are undeniably lucrative, bringing in perhaps several million dollars in additional admission fees and sales of soft drinks, T-shirts, and other novelties. A portion of that, up to about half a million dollars per loan, goes back to China for panda conservation.

There were five short-term loans to Western zoos last year; this year some 30 institutions have been negotiating with the Chi-

nese for panda loans.

Claiming that the loans are intended for commercial gain and not for the good of the species, World Wildlife Fund and the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums sued the federal government in May to try to block the exhibit of two pandas at the Toledo Zoo (Research News, 29 July, p. 529). The case is pending.

The two groups maintain that the loans interfere with captive breeding efforts, which are essential if the species is to survive. Many of the pandas sent on tour, including the two now at the Toledo Zoo, are of prime breeding age, in violation of China's stated policy of sending only non-breeding animals.

All along, the Chinese have maintained that they loan out their treasured pandas only in response to intense pressure from Western zoos and politicians. Mayor Koch lobbied for last year's loan at the Bronx Zoo; Jimmy Carter put in a good word for the Atlanta Zoo when he was in Beijing.

As part of their new, tougher stance on panda loans, the Chinese government has just refused to extend the Toledo Zoo loan for a second 100 days. Thus, the two controversial pandas are heading home to the breeding facility at the Wolong Reserve.

■ LESLIE ROBERTS

Radon Survey Seen as Misleading by Some Scientists

The release last week by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of a survey of indoor radon concentrations has stirred different reactions among the public and in scientific circles. The public learned from the media that the hazard of radon-related lung cancer is more severe and more widespread than EPA scientists had thought. Some scientists are saying it isn't so. "I'm appalled at the way the EPA is doing it," says Anthony Nero of the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, "They're grossly misrepresenting their own data."

The data involved are measurements of the radioactive gas radon made in a total of 22,600 homes in 17 states during the past two winters. In conducting the surveys, the states, with EPA assistance, exposed charcoal canisters in selected houses and measured the amount of radon retained by the charcoal. The space chosen was the lowest in the house, often the basement.

In releasing the new results, the EPA said that it intentionally designed the survey "to obtain measurements of the highest detectable radon levels." During the winter, closed windows trap more of the radon seeping through house foundations, and often the lowest space was the basement, the room closest to the source of radon. The resulting inflated concentrations of radon would assist the states in identifying areas of exceptional indoor concentrations to be targeted in subsequent work. Those homeowners in the survey who were informed that their readings were relatively low would also know that they probably have no problem to correct.

What the EPA did not manage to get across to the public was that such screening surveys are nearly useless in determining the prevalence of radon health hazards (*Science*, 29 April, p. 606). The intentionally inflated readings highlight problem regions and screen out the potential problem houses, but they are no measure of occupants' radon exposure, the likelihood of lung cancer being proportional to exposure.

Among the printed materials provided to the press, the only clear enunciation of this limitation came in footnotes to the two maps presenting survey results. "Note: These results represent screening measurements," they read, "and should not be used to estimate annual averages or health risks." The confusion was inevitably compounded by the joint release of the radon survey results with a national radon health advisory



Jessie Cohen, National Zoological Park, Smithsonian Institution

China's goodwill ambassador. A hold on loans to U.S. zoos.