has not accepted any special role with respect to industry.

Council members serve voluntarily, as do the approximately 500 additional professionals who serve on its committees. All of these persons regard highly their responsibility to serve in the public interest.

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RU 486 Development

To the well-written article by Jeremy Cherfas entitled "Dispute surfaces over paternity of RU 486" (News & Comment, 24 Nov., p. 994), we would like to add the following, and as far as we are concerned, final comments.

A number of confused allegations cited in the article could tend to accredit the idea that RU 486 is the result of a blind screening. We want to state kindly but firmly that the discovery of the properties of RU 486 and the related class of compounds is the logical result of a classical research approach, familiar to anyone well acquainted with drug design. This is quite different from any "stumbling," although some of the results had not been clearly expected, which is indeed the hallmark of true research. The approach followed by the Roussel researchers can easily be traced back from the evidence of laboratory records, research reports, scientific papers, and finally patents (see, for instance, EP 0 057 115). Up to now, the Roussel research team has not been aware of playing anybody's score in this matter, nor of the existence of any "composer and conductor."

We feel it most unfortunate to have had to enter into this argument, but we resented the recent, and for the first time clearly stated, claims about the design of RU 486 (News & Comment, 22 Sept., p. 1323) as an issue concerning the dignity of all the scientists and technicians once involved in the project and, as a matter of fact, the dignity of the whole of Roussel's research.

This being said, we consider that any further argument on our part would be superfluous and that it is not worth making a personal grievance of anything whatsoever, especially not questions of scientific credit. Everyone will agree that the practice of science, as well as the reports made of it, should tend toward the greatest possible objectivity and rely on factual evidence. And this is, in this instance, our only motivation.

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Waste Site Cleanup

Philip H. Abelson is correct in describing the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Superfund track record as poor (Editorial, 1 Dec., p. 1097), but his call for the Department of Energy (DOE) to lead the federal government's effort to clean up the nation's abandoned or inactive hazardous waste sites is a bit like suggesting that Pandora knows best how to close the box. If cost of decontamination is any measure of the mess created, there is ample evidence that DOE and its contractors know how to pollute. The price tag for tidying up at DOE's 3700 sites is estimated to be $130 billion. There is little evidence, other than the DOE report (*1*) to which Abelson makes reference, however, that the department has the capacity or the will to clean up.

DOE has a spotty record regarding environmental compliance and no demonstrated

ability to perform environmental restoration. DOE Secretary James D. Watkins' clear personal commitment to change the historic attitudes within DOE and reduce its long-standing resistance to environmental regulation still appears to be only that—a personal commitment. There is no legislation yet in place to drive DOE when Watkins' tenure is over.

The report to which Abelson refers is a welcome step toward dealing with the department's massive problems. But DOE has a long road to travel before it can prove itself capable of responsible remediation. In the past when answerable to no one, it was unable to protect either the environment or the health of its workers. To suggest that this polluter now controls not only its own remediation program but also that of others is to ignore years of empirical evidence and to accept one government report.

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1. "Applied research, development, demonstration, testing, and evaluation plan for environmental restoration and waste management" (Department of Energy, Washington, DC, 1989).