

## European Weather Forecasters Get One Right

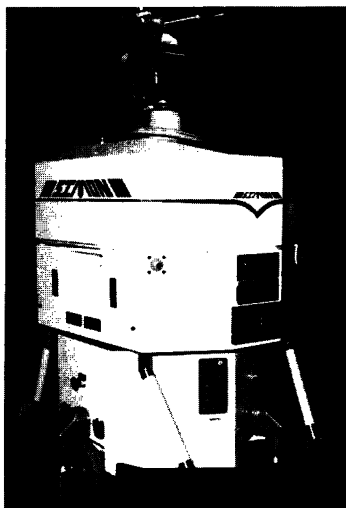
It was an unlikely rematch. Little more than 2 years after being drubbed by a once-in-a-lifetime storm, Europe faced an equally powerful storm last month. British forecasters had particular reason to be uneasy, having blown the prediction of the October 1987 storm that ripped through southern England with winds gusting to more than 160 kilometers per hour (*Science*, 11 March 1988, p. 1238).

This time, British forecasters were on top of the situation. Instead of issuing a few hours' warning, they alerted the populace more than a day ahead. Lessons learned in 1987 may have helped. Computer forecast models are now run on a schedule allowing inclusion of the latest, most crucial data. The models are not allowed to assume more about the present weather than is prudent. And the Meteorological Office has a new computer eight times as powerful as the one used for predictions in 1987. Forecasters also got a break—"this was a better behaved storm" in terms of predictability, notes a Met Office spokesman.

Engineers at Savannah River, the U.S. production site for plutonium and tritium used in nuclear weapons, have spent the past 4 years developing and training Simon to do what they cannot. They would like to monitor reactors in operation rather than shutting down the entire works, as they do now, for several days of cooling to let humans approach.

Simon is shielded with lead and fitted out with high-intensity lights and a Cyclopean television eye. It has radiation detectors to measure neutrons and gamma rays, temperature gauges, radio and microwave transmitters, and four computers to aid in data analysis and navigation.

Simon can seek out power



Savannah River Site

**Simple Simon.** He's "hot."

and data outlets on the walls by itself, sucking in electricity for its batteries and fresh information as it roams through hot passageways. If all goes as planned, Simon will be put to use at Savannah River next year. Future generations may be developed for commercial nuclear plants.

## U.S.-Soviet Diabetes Project

A collaborative diabetes project, billed as "the most extensive joint health care project ever undertaken by the United States and the U.S.S.R.," was officially launched in Moscow on 22 January.

The 5-year agreement is between the International Diabetes Center (IDC) in Minneapolis, the world's leading center for diabetes education and training, and the Soviet health ministry's Central Institute for Advanced Medical Studies.

The Soviets have designated diabetes as one of their major health problems. It is aggravated by shortages of insulin and disposable syringes and by difficulties in dietary management because of chronic food shortages.

A team from Minneapolis flew to Moscow last month to conduct 2 weeks of training for professors and physicians from around the Soviet Union. The



Reuters/Bettmann Newsphotos

**After the storm.** Scene on London's Victoria Embankment.

But despite that, 38 people died in Britain in the recent storm (as opposed to only 17 in 1987). This time the high winds covered a larger area and struck during the day when more people are outside.

collaboration will also include clinical research, the development of educational materials, and faculty exchanges.

Ultimately, according to the IDC, the Soviets want to "build a major international diabetes center in Moscow which mirrors the one in Minneapolis."



## Patent Court Gets First Scientist

An organic chemist, Alan D. Lourie, has been nominated by President Bush to serve on the special federal circuit court that hears appeals on patent cases. Lourie, also an attorney, is currently vice president for corporate patents and trademarks at SmithKline Beckman Corporation.

Members of the pharmaceutical industry have hailed the nomination which was promoted by the Industrial Biotechnology Association. Senate confirmation is expected.

## Room at the Top

At what many observers find a frustratingly slow pace, the White House is filling the remaining vacancies in the science policy hierarchy. On 19 January President Bush announced the nominations of William D. Phillips and Eugene Wong to the two empty associate director posts at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

Phillips most recently served as president of the Missouri Advanced Technology Institute, but he has divided the bulk of his nearly 40-year professional career between two chemical industry giants: Du Pont and Mallinckrodt.

Wong is an electrical engineer who has been on the faculty of the University of California at Berkeley since 1962.

Word is that another nagging vacancy is about to be filled. Robert Marshall White, vice president for research and development at Control Data Corporation, is expected to be nominated as undersecretary of commerce for technology, a new post created to provide direction for civilian technology policy. The Administration has had a devilish time trying to find someone with the right industrial and demographic qualifications, and despite being a top priority, the post has taken more than a year to fill.