

Briefings

edited by DAVID P. HAMILTON

More Mice on the Way, Thanks to NIH

Officials at Jackson Laboratory breathed a sigh of relief late last month. They finally got word that the National Institutes of Health has signed off on a \$9.5-million grant to help the lab rebuild mouse breeding facilities that were destroyed by fire on 20 May 1989. The fire cut off supplies of rare genetic mouse strains used in a wide variety of research projects around the country.

It has been nearly a year since Congress authorized money for the rebuilding effort. Meanwhile, Jackson has been deep in the hole financially because it began an ambitious construction program with only about a third of the expected cost in hand (*Science*, 10 August, p. 620).

The current grant will relieve some of the strain, but it's not sufficient to cover all Jackson's remaining costs. Lab officials reckon they'll still need \$10 million to finish the job and are hoping for a second NIH award in the upcoming year.

Where Is the SSC Cost Estimate?

Now 4 weeks overdue, the Department of Energy's final estimate for the Superconducting Super Collider is as tightly shrouded as ever. DOE spokespeople say the report has been held up by interagency review, final editing changes, and the Middle East crisis. But sources within DOE point to another culprit: the protracted federal budget negotiations. "I'm assuming that if they take a swipe at the [DOE] budget, we don't want to have made a commitment to the SSC," says one official.

Officials still refuse to confirm or deny reports that DOE's Independent Cost Estimating group came up with an estimate of \$11.7 billion. One did acknowledge that the ICE estimate "came in high," adding that, unlike estimates from three other groups, the ICE figures have not been committed to a final report. "I suspect that's by design," the official says. Other officials play down the importance of "bottom-line" figures, emphasizing the difficulty of reconciling complex analyses.

These accounts hint at unexpected ferment within the process of sorting out the conflicting estimates. Although Deputy Energy Secretary W. Henson Moore told reporters this summer that DOE was likely to go with the lowest estimate of \$7.8 billion, "there's been some give and take in that regard," says one official. "I don't think you should take what he said really literally."

No one seems to know when the estimate might actually appear, either. "If you want a wild guess, there's always the 1992 budget process," says an official. "As frustrated as you are, we are equally frustrated."

Still Flying Blind in the War on Drugs

It's been 8 years since the Reagan Administration began its War on Drugs. So physicians and policymakers should by now have good information on whether drug treatment actually works, right?

Not exactly, says an Institute of Medicine panel, which recently analyzed existing research on the treatment of drug abuse.* While several programs have demonstrated their effectiveness, overall understanding of drug treatment is hardly adequate, says panel chairman Lawrence Lewin. Most research on the subject is largely devoted to heroin addiction—a very different, and much smaller, problem than cocaine abuse. Furthermore, little data has been collected since 1981.

The IOM panel attributes the lack of up-to-date research to a decline in federal support over the past decade, but also charges drug treatment programs with "permitting and in some cases tacitly encouraging the paucity of treatment research." These programs have often been "characterized too much by a fear of failure and too little by the courage of their convictions," the report states.

The government's top priority should be to target cocaine treatment, the panel argues. The report also recommends higher spending: a \$1-billion initial investment followed by an additional \$2.2 billion a year intended to eliminate waiting lists and expand treatment for mothers with young children and prison inmates. At least 1% of these funds should be made available for treatment evaluation, Lewin says.

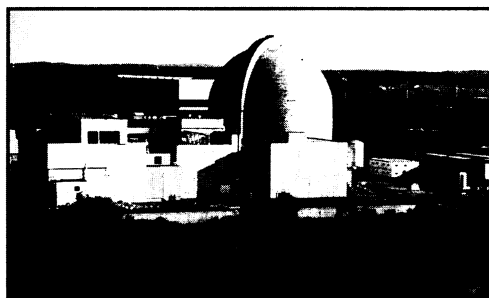
* *Treating Drug Problems* (National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 1990).

Fear and Loathing of Nuclear Power

Advocates of civilian nuclear energy have long maintained that the public doesn't accept such plants mainly because it is fundamentally ignorant of the way risks are assessed. If people understand the facts, they say, opposition to nuclear power will dissipate in the clear light of reason. But a recent study* shows that educating the public about these risks can have just the opposite effect.

In 1989, Taiwan's state-operated power corporation, Taipower, undertook a 4-month "risk communication program" to convince the public of the need for a new nuclear power plant. Taipower spent over \$460,000 to produce 150 lectures, debates, and discussion groups at schools and cultural centers, as well as a series of public television programs emphasizing the merits of the new plant. In addition, the corporation offered to compensate residents living near the plant by over \$6 million a year during the 10-year construction period and \$4.6 million a year thereafter.

Researchers Jin Tan Liu of the Academia Sinica in Taiwan and V. Kerry Smith of North Carolina State University found, however, that instead of leaving the public more receptive to the idea of nuclear power, Taipower's campaign only "in-



New Hampshire Yankee photo

Understanding, but not forgiving. *Learning about the risks of nuclear accidents may not improve public attitudes toward nuclear power plants like the Seabrook facility, above.*

creased respondents' perceptions of the seriousness of risks posed by nuclear plants." Their survey of 404 households interviewed before and after the Taipower campaign revealed that "increased risk perceptions after the debate made respondents less likely to favor the plant."

These conclusions hold clear implications for the U.S. nuclear industry, Smith says. "You have to do more than just provide people with facts." Smith adds that his research into the related problem posed by nuclear waste disposal suggests another way of swaying the public. "There are clear indicators that when local authorities have the power to oversee and to shut things down, the more acceptable the whole notion becomes."

* "Risk Communication and Attitude Change: Taiwan's National Debate Over Nuclear Power" (Resources for the Future, Discussion Paper QE90-21).