

edited by RICHARD STONE



A bad smell. Critics dump on EPA for ignoring the cost of cleaning up environmental hazards.

EPA's Goals Lack A Price Tag

Few argue with the goals: Safe air, safe drinking water, and protection of endangered species are always popular. But an attempt by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to spell out how it plans to achieve such goals through regulations is being criticized by other federal agencies for

failing to specify how much they will cost or who will pay.

The exercise is a departure for EPA, which in its 25-year history has rarely tried to set an internal agenda for implementing regulations or achieving its goals. Two years ago, however, EPA policy experts began to sum up what the agency hoped to accomplish under existing regulations. This approach is now mandated by a law that requires every agency to set internal performance standards as part of its budget request (*Science*, 6 January, p. 20).

Last month, EPA completed a draft report that spells out both

long-range goals and short-term benchmarks. For instance, one long-term goal is to ensure that "the air will be safe to breathe in every city and community"; the corresponding benchmark is to reduce the number of cities failing to meet air quality standards from 60 in 1995 to six in 2005.

Although EPA's Peter Truitt says "People have been extremely pleased we're doing this," a Department of Energy official who has seen the report says the absence of a cost-benefit analysis "is ludicrous." Truitt acknowledges the defect but says the final report, to be released next month, won't contain one. "I've been told we won't be able to do [such an analysis] in less than 2 years," Truitt says.

More Clout for Federal Health Research?

Big changes in the federal health bureaucracy may occur this spring as a result of the "Reinventing Government" campaign started in 1993 by Vice President Al Gore. Phase two of this process, or REGO-2 as it's known, looks like it could benefit agencies of the Public Health Service (PHS). The reason: One scheme under consideration would promote PHS to a higher status within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). In addition to reducing paperwork, sources say, it would give more autonomy to the National Institutes of Health.

According to an official who asked to remain anonymous, a change of this kind could come about if a REGO-2 plan drafted by HHS wins favor in the next few weeks. One idea reportedly discussed with Gore's staff recently would do away with redundancies cropping up in HHS now that the Social Security Administration has moved out of the department. Some regulatory review functions would be consolidated. And one plan would fold the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry into the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, while at the same time combining the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research

with the Health Resources and Services Administration. Each PHS supergroup would report directly to the HHS secretary, as would other large health divisions. The position of assistant secretary for health, now held by Philip Lee, might be merged into the secretary's office as deputy secretary, according to this scheme. Substantial changes of this kind would require legislation, however.

Officially, HHS and the vice president's office have no comment on these plans, although one White House official said decisions arising from the REGO-2 review are likely to be made public "by the end of March."

RAC Learns of Fourth Human Retrovirus

A Seattle cancer researcher may have found a new human retrovirus while screening patients in a gene marking experiment. Dusty Miller, a researcher at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center in Seattle, made the surprise discovery this year while running a sensitive test for viral contaminants in a clinical experiment he was monitoring, according to federal officials.

The organism, unlike most other viral fragments in the human genome, appears capable of replicating and migrating to other cells. If it proves "replication competent," in the jargon of the field, it would be the fourth human retrovirus isolated, after the three well-known pathogenic types HTLV-I, HTLV-II, and HIV.

Miller was unavailable at press time, but his name was included on the 7 March agenda of the Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee of the National Institutes of Health (RAC), on which he sits. Government officials say Miller found the new retrovirus, which is similar to a known cat virus called RD 114, at low concentrations in the bone marrow cells of four cancer patients. As far as has been determined, it is not pathogenic.

Pharmacia Offers \$20,000 Thesis Prize

New molecular biologists the world over can now compete for a major award and publication in *Science* as part of the new Pharmacia Biotech and *Science* Prize for Young Scientists. Anyone who received a Ph.D. in 1994 is eligible for a \$20,000 first prize and seven runners-up prizes of \$5000. A *Science*-chosen panel headed by Nobelist Thomas E. Cech will pick the most outstanding essay based on a thesis. For more information, call 202-326-6501 in the U.S. or 44 1223 302-067 in Britain; or via Internet at science_editors@aaas.org or science@science-int.co.uk. The deadline is 5 July.

State Court Restores Tobacco Research Fund

In a victory for researchers studying the health effects of tobacco, a state judge has ordered California to stop spending \$56 million in tax revenues diverted from a tobacco research fund. The decision paves the way for new grants from California's highly regarded Tobacco-Related Disease Research Program (TRDRP).

TRDRP has received \$135 million from California's Proposition 99, a voter-mandated surtax on tobacco products. Run by the University of California, TRDRP has funded research in areas such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, nicotine addiction, and public policy.

Last July, the California legislature rerouted 80%

of TRDRP's \$22 million budget to pay for health care for the poor—cutting off 66 current grantees. The



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American Lung Association and the American Cancer Society sued (*Science*, 16 September 1994, p. 1647). California Superior Court judge Roger Warren agreed with the plaintiffs: At a 16 February hearing, he ordered the state to stop spending the money immediately. The court decision "was one of the highlights of my career," says TRDRP Director Charles Gruder.

Researchers left high and dry this year will have first dibs on the restored funds, says Gruder. The state has 60 days to appeal the ruling.