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Mucked up? EPA union reps have decried the agency's reorganization, saying it will harm studies on wetlands and other ecosystems.

EPA Research Overhaul Draws Fire

Any plan to consolidate power has its detractors, and the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) 1-year-old overhaul of its research program is no exception. Now EPA's labor unions have jumped into the fray and are asking EPA research chief Robert Huggert to strengthen links among the agency's ecology labs. In a letter obtained by *Science*, a coalition of labor unions—represent-

senting scientists and technicians—at four EPA labs argues that the overhaul “fails to recognize ... fundamental requirements for ecological research.”

Last July, EPA unveiled a plan to reorganize its in-house labs by subsuming its 12 main labs under four “megalabs” (*Science*, 29 July 1994, p. 599). The megalabs are organized according to a “risk-assessment paradigm,” which means that one megalab does research on health and environmental effects, another monitors exposures to hazards, a third prepares risk assessments, and a fourth develops pollution prevention technologies. The shuffle spreads EPA's ecology and human health labs across the four megalabs.

The coalition argues that it would be more logical to ally all the ecology outfits under a single megalab. EPA officials are “so attached to the [risk-assessment] paradigm that they've forgotten how ecological science actually works,” says ecologist William Davis, who serves as union rep for EPA's lab in Gulf Breeze, Florida. The reorganization, says Davis, “takes away the synthesis that goes on among the different levels of ecological science.”

EPA officials disagree. “The feedback we've received suggests this is a pretty good way to organize in a mission-driven agency,” says EPA's Thomas Hadd, who doesn't foresee any major change in the restructuring plan.

Davis says the coalition has no plans to organize a strike. “Scientists aren't big on strikes,” he says. Rather, Davis says, “we want to get a discussion going.”

Misconduct Office Gets Mixed Review

If swift justice is fair justice, then scientists accused of wrongdoing—and their accusers—may be getting a bum deal from the government, according to a draft report obtained by *Science*. The federal office that investigates scientific fraud “faces a substantial case backlog and lengthy delays in completing its work,” concludes a report soon to be released by Congress's General Accounting Office (GAO).

Prompted by questions about federal oversight in this area, Senators David Pryor (D-AR), William Cohen (R-ME), and Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS) last year commissioned a GAO review of the Office of Research Integrity (ORI) within the Department of Health and Human Services. The GAO's draft report finds “few concerns” with the quality of oversight after reviewing 10 formal ORI investigations and sampling 30 cases that were dismissed without action. But it also finds that ORI remains bogged down in paperwork.

The draft report notes that ORI has “made progress” in cutting down a backlog of 70 active cases and 420 allegations it inherited at its creation in November 1992. By April 1995, ORI had whittled away at the mountain, dismissing allegations or shifting them to active status.

ORI is struggling to keep up with new work, however. By April, the 50-person fraud squad, which has a budget of \$50 million a year, had completed initial screening of only 208 of the 288 allegations it received between June 1993 and December 1994, and most of the unscreened cases had remained open for more than 6 months. Since 1992, ORI has overseen 10 misconduct investigations—six by other institutions and four by its own staff.

The report notes ORI has begun devising a strategic plan and recommends that it devise more explicit performance guidelines for staffers. ORI officials could not be reached for comment.

Feuding Erupts (Again) On Science Panel

The tension between Democrats and Republicans on the House Science Committee has been building in recent weeks, as both sides have accused each other of dirty tactics. Last week, the acrimony boiled over in dueling press releases after the panel approved legislation authorizing funds for science agencies in 1996. Depending on which one you believe, the panel either “affirmed the importance of science to our

future”—the majority version—or made “wide-ranging, politically motivated cuts in research programs”—the minority take.

Democrats, led by George Brown (CA), issued a “program casualty list” that details a litany of cuts and terminations. Cuts include climate change research at the Environmental Protection Agency (from \$22.5 million this year to \$2.4 million in 1996); among the terminations are 19 Energy Department programs, such as the Tokamak Physics Experi-

ment. “Rather than protecting scientific investments, the Science Committee ... embraced these massive cuts,” Brown said.

Republicans counter that they ferreted out wasteful spending and corporate welfare. They argue that their approach earned them credibility in the House Appropriations Committee, which has now begun to make actual spending decisions, giving Science Chair Robert Walker (R-PA) more clout when it comes to securing science funds.

Department of Science: The Sequel?

The Republicans are talking about creating a Department of Science, in part because they may need to find a home for research programs that would be orphaned if the Department of Energy (DOE) is abolished. So it's ironic that the last time Republicans thought about a science department—in 1989, the first year of the Bush Administration—the idea came from DOE officials interested in empire-building. The adverse reaction then may bode ill for this year's efforts.

The secret history was revealed last week by former Deputy DOE Secretary Henson Moore, during testimony before the House Science Committee. “I've heard all the arguments” the chair is likely to face, said Moore. The earlier plan would have expanded DOE research programs into a governmentwide Depart-

ment of Science. However, Moore recalls, DOE Secretary James Watkins considered it a political hot potato better left for a second Bush Administration.

Moore says he didn't bother to run the idea past Allan Bromley, the president's science adviser, because “Bromley didn't have authority over spending programs.” Bromley, now Yale's engineering dean, admits he wasn't involved—and for good reason. “Nobody thought it was a good idea,” he says. “It was just an attempt by DOE to expand its turf.”

Allies in the current push for a science department, led by Representative Robert Walker (R-PA), chair of the science committee, are hoping the proposal picks up more steam after hearings this summer on the subject of reorganizing federal science.