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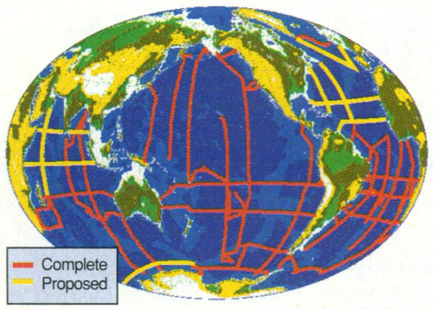

DOE

Nipped near the finish? Budget cuts may throttle cruises planned to complete a global survey of carbon dioxide in the oceans.

DOE Targets Health, Environmental Research

Word is quietly being passed down to some biological and environmental scientists that their Department of Energy (DOE)–funded research may not survive this year's congressional budget cuts. Among those told in recent weeks that their programs are on the chopping block are scientists conducting research on global climate change and radiation health effects.

Ari Patrinos, associate director of DOE's Office of Health and Environmental Research, says he expects Congress could cut $30 million to $50 million from his office's $430 million budget. Patrinos says DOE will try to protect genome and structural biology work because these are "the new paradigm" in health-effects research. But that means radiation biology could take the brunt of a 50% cut in DOE's $25 million health-effects program, he says. Particularly vulnerable is a $2.6 million cell biology lab at the University of California, San Francisco, that DOE has funded since 1964.

Ecology and oceans research related to global climate change is also at risk; oceanography could be cut altogether, saving $12 million, Patrinos says. Among those who got bad news last month were participants in DOE's $2-million-per-year share of an international project to assess the role of the oceans as a carbon dioxide sink. The House has zeroed out funds for the work, saying it lies outside DOE's mission. But given the agency's role in energy research, the project is "very much relevant," insists team coordinator Douglas Wallace of Brookhaven National Laboratory in New York.

Patrinos notes that the cuts aren't final and says his office is engaged in an "intensive dialogue" with other agencies to salvage parts of joint programs, such as the World Ocean Circulation Experiment, also funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

U.S.–Russian Science Foundation Takes Shape

A foundation for U.S.–Russian cooperative research projects, stuck in the starting blocks since it was authorized by Congress 3 years ago, is finally up and running.

Funding woes have held up the foundation's debut ever since Representative George Brown (D–CA) sponsored legislation establishing it in 1992. The money was to come from a Department of Defense fund meant for defense conversion aid to the former Soviet Union, and last year DOD finally set aside $10 million for the project. But releasing the money hinged on matching funds that the National Science Foundation (NSF) hoped to receive from billionaire George Soros's International Science Foundation (ISF). The ISF came through with $5 million this May, freeing up half the DOD funds.

That put the ball in the NSF's court. NSF is charged with overseeing the foundation—called The U.S. Civilian Research and Development Foundation for the Newly Independent States of the Soviet Union—which will eventually operate as an independent nonprofit. NSF Director Neal Lane is now setting up a board of directors, which will hold its first meeting on 13 and 14 September. Tom Owens of NSF's division of international programs expects the board will solicit proposals later this fall that could result in awarding the entire $10 million. Owens says the program could continue if the Russian government follows through on "a good-faith commitment" it made to Soros to pitch in as well, to the tune of $10 million.

Meanwhile, ISF, which runs out of money this year, is moving forward with plans to stay in business as a service for administrating grants from other donors—including, it hopes, the new civilian fund. The goal is to preserve ISF's Russian contacts, tax breaks, and other infrastructure, "instead of having that fall by the wayside," says ISF staffer James Garry.

Thailand Trial for AIDS Therapeutic Vaccine?

Immune Response Corp. (IRC) is on the verge of completing an agreement with Thai officials to stage tests of its therapeutic AIDS vaccine in thousands of HIV-infected Thais, well-placed sources tell *Science*. This could be the largest test of a therapeutic HIV vaccine—which aims to boost the immune systems of people already infected with HIV—yet undertaken anywhere in the world, and could determine once and for all whether the controversial concept has merit.

The IRC vaccine was first developed by the late Jonas Salk of polio vaccine fame. Small-scale trials in the United States, begun in 1987, have been watched with skepticism, although the vaccine appears safe and has shown hints of promise. Last January, the Food and Drug Administration gave the San Diego–based IRC the green light to stage large trials in the United States to determine whether the vaccine actually staves off AIDS and death (*Science*, 17 February 1995, p. 966), and those, too, are expected to start soon.

Although company CEO Dennis Carlo says he can neither confirm nor deny that the company is negotiating with Thailand, sources say the deal could go through as early as this week.

Salk Shuffle

In what threatens to become an annual tradition, the Salk Institute for Biological Studies is once again swapping leaders. As of 1 September, Nobel laureate Francis Crick will no longer serve as president of the La Jolla, California, institute, and Charles Massey will turn in his CEO hat. They will be replaced on an acting basis by businessmen John Henry Felix and Frederick Rentschler, the chair and vice chair of Salk's Board of Trustees.

Felix says Crick stepped down due to a heart condition. Massey's resignation was planned. The two took office last October after Salk CEO/President Brian Henderson suddenly resigned. Their joint appointment was meant to take pressure off the committee searching for a permanent leader. Felix says the board is "down to a short list" and hopes to hire a head by 1996.

Japan to Fight Recession With Research

Japan appears to be bucking the global tide of trimming government funds for science. This month the government told its ministries to set aside $1.4 billion more next fiscal year for research and infrastructure, even as it announced other budget cuts.

The allocation of new money—$12.5 billion was spent on science in 1993—will be worked out between now and December, and won't be official until the 1996 budget is adopted in April. But an official of the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, and Culture (Monbusho) says it hopes to spend more on research grants, facility upgrades, and the new Centers of Excellence (*Science*, 28 July, p. 474).

The spending boost is in part a response to cuts in private sector research as the Japanese economy remains mired in a 3.5-year recession. In fact, Japan's overall research spending dipped in 1993 for the first time in 40 years, according to the Science and Technology Agency. Although telecommunications and computer networks are certain to be part of the new package, basic research should also benefit. "The government is seeking to nurture the seeds of future industries," the Monbusho official says.