CALIFORNIA EPA

Paper-Trail Cleanup Memo Sparks Furor

The California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) is in an uproar over a proposed policy that would require some agency scientists to destroy initial drafts, electronic mail, and other documents that do not reflect final regulatory rules. Last week, CalEPA officials put the proposed policy on hold after environmental and journalist organizations filed a lawsuit. But the episode has provided a golden opportunity for the agency's critics to charge that the "shredder" policy is an attempt to stifle scientific dissent on sensitive environmental regulations.

The controversy centers on a four-page memo circulated on 19 April by Charles Shulock, chief deputy director of CalEPA's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). Called the Records Retention Policy, it directs staff to "dispose of" "all pre-decisional deliberative material not reflected in the final decision or document," including electronic mail, drafts, and "other communications." According to the memo, the policy's objective is to "[protect] ... candid, uninhibited scientific exchange" and "guard against confusion caused by conflicting statements made in the course of deliberations and discussions."

OEHHA scientists began complaining about the memo to their union, the California Association of Professional Scientists. And on 1 October, the Society of Professional Journalists and two environmental groups, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and the Environmental Law Foundation, filed a suit in Superior Court in San Francisco challenging the policy. OEHHA director Richard Becker suspended action the same day, saying no documents had been destroyed. He later told *Science* that the memo would not have required staff to destroy scientific data, and that he "freely admits" that it caused "considerable confusion." At press time, NRDC and CalEPA were negotiating a revised strategy for handling internal documents.

Observers say that the proposed clampdown came as no surprise. CalEPA is constantly contending with queries from environmentalists who often find fault with agency decisions. "I think it's an attempt to keep disparate opinions out of the hands of people who could inflate them for their own purposes," says Thomas Mack, a University of Southern California epidemiologist who chairs a CalEPA advisory committee.

Not surprisingly, environmental organizations see the memo in a somewhat darker light. William Pease of the Environmental Defense Fund, an environmental organization which is working with the NRDC on the issue, contends that it is part of a pattern of agency managers censoring scientists' decisions on sensitive matters, such as a recent report on pesticide spraying near the town of Lompoc in Santa Barbara County. Becker, however, counters that "there is no connection between [the memo] and any study."

Few agency researchers have spoken publicly about the issue, but one midlevel scientist spoke to *Science* on condition of anonymity: "Management is telling senior staff that this is what they're going to send out the door and don't bother with any further analysis." The scientist also contends that over the past 2 years, staff had increasingly been told to revise and even change conclusions. "That has infuriated basically all [of us]."

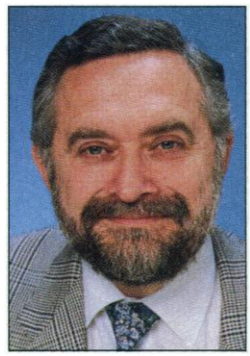
Mack says, however, that he is skeptical of the charges that managers—whose job is to combine scientific information with economic considerations—have been quashing dissent. He characterizes the memo more sympathetically as a "clumsy attempt to speak with one voice as an agency." Epidemiologist Richard Jackson, who left the agency in 1992 and 2 years ago became head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Environmental Health, offers another view. When asked whether managers have tampered with scientists' conclusions, Jackson responded: "I've observed increasing mistrust between the management and the scientists within OEHHA over a long period of time. I think the memo was simply a breaking point for a lot of people."

–Jocelyn Kaiser

SCIENCE PRIZES

Critics Say Laskers Omitted NO Pioneer

Teamwork and cooperation are widely praised in science. Yet when prizes are given for scientific achievement, the committees that pick winners often have to narrow their vision mercilessly. They dissect big discoveries to the core, limiting honors to the smallest possible number of contributors. (The Nobel Prize, for example, can be shared by no more than three people.) This method of allocating credit can be harsh, and it can lead to postprize disappointment—usually muted. But this year, several distinguished scientists—including at least three Nobel winners—have made a quasi-public protest over the handling of the Albert Lasker Basic Medical Research Award, which many people regard as a precursor to winning the Nobel.



NO prize. Salvador Moncada did key experiments.

The award, which has included as many as five people, was given last week to two Americans for "seminal and ingenious discoveries which led to the fundamental understanding of the role of nitric oxide [NO] in health and disease" (*Science*, 4 October, p. 39). But the recipient list should have been longer, say the dissenters. Not that the two men named as winners by the Lasker committee—Robert Furchgott of the State University of New York Health Science Center in Brooklyn, and Ferid Murad, former CEO of Molecular Geriatrics Corp. in Lake Bluff, Illinois—were chosen wrongly, they say. Rather, they claim that the Lasker committee failed to name a pioneer in this field: Salvador Moncada of University College, London. And some say that a fourth important leader was left out: Lou Ignarro of the University of California, Los Angeles.

The most outspoken in the dissenting group is Sir John Vane of Cambridge University, an expert on the vascular system, former Burroughs Wellcome researcher, and one of three who shared the Nobel Prize in 1982 for research on prostaglandins. Vane says he heard about the Lasker prize selection about 2 weeks before it was announced, and he "was devastated." Moncada had been Vane's student and friend, and, as a postdoc, he had done a lot of research that was involved in Vane's Nobel.

Vane acknowledges that Furchgott and Ignarro were the first to suggest in 1986 that an elusive vasodilator then known as endothelial derived relaxing factor (EDRF) was in fact probably nitric oxide. Murad's contribution, according to the Lasker awards citation, was to identify a class of nitrogen-containing agents that stimulate the formation of EDRF. He also suggested that these compounds might all be metabolized to nitric oxide, the actual messenger. Moncada, however, "actually showed it," says Vane, publishing experimental results in 1987 demonstrating that EDRF was nitric oxide. Indeed, Vane says that Moncada "really created the field [of nitric oxide physiology] in terms of doing important experiments, discoveries, and going