



For rent? Menlo Park geologists' move may mean vacating this new \$40 million building.

Moving Order Rattles USGS Lab

For scientists at the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS's) Western headquarters in Menlo Park, California, being on shaky ground is both reality and metaphor. After surviving recent congressional threats to eliminate the agency and drastic staff cuts, scientists now face the prospect of leaving the San Francisco Bay area for cheaper digs.

The \$85-million-per-year, 800-staffer operation has been in Menlo Park since 1955, and just

last year moved some programs into a new, \$40 million federal building. But Department of Interior officials felt it was time to move because real estate prices have skyrocketed in Menlo Park. In a 21 August memo, USGS chief

Gordon Eaton cites "the high cost of operating in the area" as well as a desire by Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt to move USGS work closer to other Interior bureaus. Several offices are in Sacramento, for instance. "Fixed costs are creeping up," says James Devine, Eaton's scientific adviser. "It's only going to get worse." The memo gives Menlo Park until 25 September to do a cost analysis of where it might move.

USGS staffers say it may make sense to shift some programs, such as water resources and minerals,

to Sacramento or other existing USGS Western offices. But they fear this may be done too hastily—and they're stunned that the memo says two buildings housing the 260-member earthquake hazards team must be vacated within a year. Last week acting Menlo Park director Patrick Muffler said that moving the program, which collects telemetry data from 370 seismology stations, would be "a pretty monumental task" and require "really big bucks."

Area geologists also say it makes little sense for the earthquake program to leave the Bay area, atop the San Andreas fault. And they're worried about severing the lab's close ties with Stanford and Berkeley. "This strikes me as a decision they came to without a lot of contemplation," says Gail Mahood, geological and environmental sciences department chair at Stanford. "It strikes me as not a done deal."

California Law Curbs Science Outreach

California's week-old anti-affirmative action law, Proposition 209, appears to mean bad news for efforts to recruit minority students into science. At least one state-sponsored outreach program is scrapping criteria based on race in favor of others, such as low socioeconomic status, that may not include as many minority group candidates.

Voters approved Prop 209 last fall (*Science*, 15 November 1996, p. 1073), but it went into effect only last week after the U.S. Court of Appeals refused to delay its implementation. Civil rights groups now plan an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. Meanwhile, state institutions—including the University of California (UC)—must discontinue any preferences given to women or minorities in contracts, employment, or education. UC admissions aren't affected, because gender and race preferences were ended last year by the UC regents.

Outreach programs aimed at

minority precollege students may be hurt, however. Mike Aldaco, director of the UC-administered Math, Engineering and Science Achievement Program (MESA), which enrolls middle- and high-school minority students in spe-

cial science programs, says MESA this fall will substitute guidelines such as educational and economic disadvantage for race and ethnicity. "Hopefully we won't lose too many minority [students] as a result," Aldaco says.

Fisher Wins \$2.75 Million Settlement

Cancer researcher Bernard Fisher has won a large award in his efforts to repair damage to his reputation after fraud was found in a study he directed. Last week Fisher, a University of Pittsburgh professor who had sued the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and Pitt after losing his job, dropped his suit in exchange for a settlement of \$2.75 million.

Fisher was forced to resign as director of the National Surgical Adjuvant Breast and Bowel Project (NSABP) in 1994 after a researcher with the project admitted to fraud. Fisher, who was also the subject of a federal investigation, was absolved of all charges last spring (*Science*, 7 March, p. 1407). Meanwhile, Fisher had filed suit against NCI and Pittsburgh for denying him due process and infringing on his right to free speech and free association.

Last week's settlement, 6 days before the case was set to go to trial, included a public apology to Fisher from the university and a statement from NCI praising his contributions to cancer research. The university also agreed to pay Fisher and his attorneys \$2.75 million. "I'm very pleased and satisfied that this is over," says Fisher. "Now I can go on and do more work under favorable circumstances." Washington, D.C., attorney Robert Charrow, who represented Fisher in a separate lawsuit against the government for invasion of privacy that lost on appeal last November, says the \$2.75 million is "the largest settlement for a First Amendment defamation case that I've ever seen."

Japan's Science Budget Growth Slips

The recent rapid growth in Japan's public spending on research will apparently slow to a crawl in the next fiscal year, thanks to efforts to cut a ballooning national budget deficit.

In budget requests submitted to the Ministry of Finance last week, the Ministry of Education (Monbusho), which funds most university-based research, asked for a total of \$48.9 billion, an increase of just 1%. And the Science and Technology Agency (STA), which supports several national labs and large-scale research efforts, is requesting \$6.2 billion, up just 1.4%. While total science-related requests won't be compiled for a few weeks, no one expects Japan will be able to match the 7% increase (to \$25 billion) it gave research this year.

The requests follow a budget reform advisory panel's recommendations that large-scale science projects be delayed and that a plan adopted just last summer to spend 17 trillion yen (\$142 billion) on research over 5 years—a roughly 50% increase over current levels—be "flexibly" implemented (*Science*, 13 June, p. 1642). Minoru Yonekura, an STA planning official, says that this plan is not being abandoned, but that the 5-year time frame is being extended indefinitely. Still, science officials are pleased they have support for slight increases, as many agencies face steep cuts.

Some fields are getting significant boosts in spite of the low-growth trend. STA has requested a 67% increase, to \$174 million, for life sciences, mostly for a new genome research effort. At Monbusho, the account that includes university centers of excellence is being cut 6.5% to \$1.1 billion, but the ministry is asking for \$310 million for new programs to support research with high economic potential. The budget figures could be squeezed further in negotiations this fall with the Finance Ministry. The final budget goes to the Diet in early 1998.