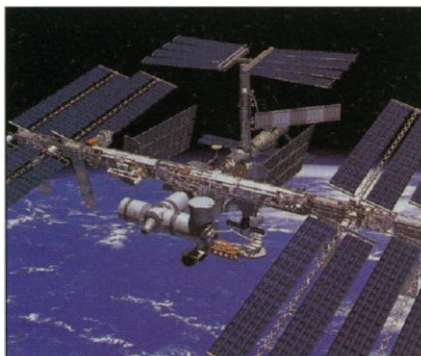


Terra Firma for USGS

After several months of hand-wringing about a plan to relocate, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has learned it will not have to vacate its western headquarters in Menlo Park, California. Earlier this week, Interior Department Secretary Bruce Babbitt announced a new 10-year lease to keep the survey and its scientists in the pricey Bay area.

The \$85-million-a-year USGS Menlo Park operation supports research on everything from earthquake hazard prediction to the water quality of San Francisco Bay. A staff of about 800 works at the Menlo Park campus, which includes a new \$40 million federal building just finished last year. Citing skyrocketing real estate costs, Interior officials last August began examining whether to move USGS's operations inland to Sacramento or elsewhere (*Science*, 5 September 1997, p. 1425).

But Interior was able to renegotiate its occupancy agreement on better terms than expected with the General Services Administration, reaching a deal to keep the survey in Menlo Park at least until 1 October 2009. A spokesperson says the agreement will save Interior millions of dollars a year.



Drifting. Russia's budget woes force delay in construction and launch of key modules.

Station Schedule Slips Again

When Vice President Al Gore has his biannual meeting with Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin next week in Washington, it won't be all smiles: Expect a tense discussion over more delays in building the international space station.

The station is already years behind schedule, but for the past year one deadline has been sacred: 16 June 1998, the day Russia was to launch the first 20-ton core module. That schedule, it now appears, will slip. The reason is the Russian government's failure to provide funding earlier this month to the Russian Space Agency (RSA) for work on the service

NASA module, a key component slated for launch in December. NASA space flight chief Joe Rothenberg said last week that the resulting construction delays would push back that launch until at least next spring. Russian officials claim they can make up lost time, but "we're skeptical," Rothenberg says, as Russia has failed to meet several previous deadlines.

NASA and the RSA are reluctant to orbit the first pieces of the station too far in advance of the service module, which contains important control systems. As a result, Russia likely will have to postpone the June launch until at least August and perhaps as late as October, say NASA officials. That would also put off the scheduled August launch of the first U.S. module.

Russia's troubles and the resulting cascade of delays are sure to be a contentious issue at the Gore-Chernomyrdin talks, Administration officials say. But they admit they have little power to press Russia to speed up the work, given the financial troubles dogging the country.

Low Profile for NSF's Education Chief

The National Science Foundation (NSF) remains mum about an investigation by the Justice Department into allegations that its top education official, Luther Williams, was paid for speaking engagements related to his job, in violation of federal law. But last week, Williams was conspicuous by his absence in a lineup of top NSF officials who briefed the agency's advisory body, the National Science Board.

In what one member called "the most stimulating afternoon I've spent here," the science board heard presentations by the heads of each of NSF's six research directorates on cutting-edge science and issues facing the community. However, when the time came to discuss education, the only speakers were John Hunt, who oversees polar programs, and Nat Pitts, who handles the S&T centers. Williams, who was listed on the agenda, sat in the audience. And a later discussion of human resources, another part of Williams's portfolio, was led by Wanda Ward, newly named as assistant to deputy NSF director Joe Bordogna.

Bordogna said that the lineup of presenters "speaks for itself" and that Williams's silence has "no significance." Williams, who has headed the directorate since 1990, declined to comment. NSF officials say Williams remains in charge of the \$632 million program, although last month Hunt also took on a newly created position as his top deputy for integrative activities.

The original investigation into Williams's conduct, first reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, was done by NSF's inspector general. Its report last September, which did not mention Williams by name, also stated that the administrator was involved in an award to an organization "with which he was negotiating" for a job. Sources have since confirmed that Williams is the target.

UC, Lilly Ask Supreme Court to Hear Insulin Case

Like groggy boxers, lawyers for the University of California (UC) and Eli Lilly & Co., an Indianapolis-based drug manufacturer, are staggering back into the ring for the last round of a 8-year-long, multimillion-dollar fight over who owns rights to exploit the human gene for insulin.

In petitions filed on 21 January and 20 February, each side has asked the Supreme Court to revisit a lower court's ruling that rejected UC's claim to be the rightful owner of a genetic discovery that is the basis for Lilly's hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of synthetic insulin sales (*Science*, 22 August 1997, p. 1028). Each side, of course, has a different reason.

UC claims that the trial in district court in 1995 was wrongly held in Lilly's hometown of Indianapolis and should have been held in California. UC argues that procedures based on the Constitution—which gives states sovereignty over certain disputes in their borders—were violated. UC wants to reargue the case at home.

Lilly, on the other hand, is happy with the results of the trial, which not only voided UC's claims but also ruled that UC scientists had engaged in "inequitable conduct." The district court found that UC scientists had used a cloning vector (pBR 322) that was temporarily off limits for safety reasons, and that they misled patent examiners about their research methods. However, an appeals court last year ruled that any misconduct was immaterial, while finding UC's patent suit invalid for other reasons.

Lilly is trying to persuade the court that the misconduct charge is relevant, claiming that legal costs (which Lilly estimated at \$20 million) should be paid by UC, as ordered by the district court. Lilly's brief asks: "Should scientists who conduct cloning experiments in knowing violation of applicable federal safety guidelines, and then misrepresent the origin of their work ... be entitled to enforce patent rights obtained from the illicit invention ...?" UC plans to file a rebuttal soon.