

EPA Said to Bar Official from Meeting

Leaked documents and advocacy for more research on indoor air pollution reportedly the cause

On 13 October, more than 400 scientists from around the world convened at the University of Massachusetts for a 4-day symposium on indoor air pollution, the first international conference to be held in the United States on the topic. Academic and industrial scientists from Japan, England, Sweden, and Yugoslavia and from across the nation were present to discuss a subject that a recent National Academy of Sciences' report declared a matter of "immediate and great concern." But to their surprise, the scientists were told during the opening speeches that the co-chairman of the meeting, David Berg, a senior official at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was unable to attend. Sources inside and outside EPA say that at the last minute, the agency barred Berg from the conference, which EPA co-sponsored, and denied him annual leave to attend because he advocated the importance of indoor air pollution at a time when the agency is all but eliminating funding in this research. There were rumors at the meeting that Berg was whisked off the program also because agency officials accused him of leaking various documents to a congressman and the press.

EPA scientists, who requested anonymity, say that agency administrators are retaliating against Berg. It is an action that has further disheartened the staff, they say, given the reorganization and the drastic budget cuts planned by EPA administrator Anne M. Gorsuch. "Morale couldn't be worse," a researcher said.

Many scientists are angered by the agency's refusal to let Berg attend the conference. "David Berg has devoted his 10 years at EPA to the issue of indoor air pollutants," said a university scientist. "Because he has those convictions within the agency, he's been victimized." Berg asked to take annual leave to attend the meeting on his own time. He was given permission but was then denied when his superiors, including Andrew Jovanovich, acting assistant administrator, discovered the reason behind his request. Repeated calls by *Science* to Jovanovich were unavailing.

According to several scientists who attended the meeting, Berg has spear-

headed EPA's modest but growing research efforts in indoor air pollution. Although he has no technical training in the subject, EPA scientists say that Berg is noted for his ability to take a broad view of the issue and to draw scientists together to address the problems. He is an adviser in energy conservation in the Office of Environmental Engineering and Technology Development and until re-



Anne Gorsuch

EPA will cut indoor air pollution studies.

cently was cochairman of an interagency task force on indoor air pollution.

But shortly before the conference, Berg was told that his responsibility for indoor air pollution had been transferred to EPA scientist Courtney Riordan, director of the Office of Monitoring Systems and Quality Assurance. Riordan, who attended the conference in place of Berg, believes that EPA is not obligated to study indoor air pollution without a clear mandate from Congress. For that reason, he says, his office "probably will not do research in indoor air pollution."

A government researcher said, "The conference was apolitical." More than 100 technical papers were presented. "It was truly a landmark conference," he said.

Scientists at the meeting also said that the agency blocked Berg's attendance because officials linked him to leaks during the past few months of internal documents on indoor air pollution. In July, Representative Toby Moffett (D-Conn.) publicly chastized EPA for cutting re-

search funds for indoor air pollution after he obtained a copy of the National Academy of Sciences' report before its official distribution. The NAS report was prepared under contract with EPA. In September, the *Washington Post* reported that EPA was considering proposed legislation that would order a 2-year study of indoor air pollution.

Although EPA may choose to pursue the study, agency scientists point out that funding for indoor air pollution research has been slashed. In 1981, EPA provided about half of all government research money, which totaled about \$10 million to study indoor pollution. After recisions, however, the total shrank to about \$5 million, according to government scientists. The Department of Energy provided a quarter of the funds and a handful of other agencies contributed the remainder. Gorsuch told a recent House subcommittee that the agency intends to cut research on specific indoor air pollution topics from \$600,000 in fiscal 1981 to \$500,000 in FY 1982. She said that funding spent on total exposure studies will increase from \$2.5 million to \$3.3 million, but only about half of this money is directly related to indoor air pollution monitoring. Agency funding for the interagency task force was sliced from \$185,000 to \$53,000 in FY 1982.

The Academy report recommends several specific areas of research that need investigation. It appears, however, that no government agency is spending any great sums of money to address the problems. When asked by legislators recently to explain EPA's meager funding of studies of indoor air pollution, Gorsuch replied that the Clean Air Act only mandates that the agency address problems in ambient air, not indoor air.

Says one scientist, "Ambient air means the environment and that includes indoor air."

Now that David Berg appears no longer to be in charge of indoor air pollution, government research is likely to lose momentum, many scientists say. They praise his ability to draw scientists together. A researcher says, "He's done a wonderful job at that. Now there will be a break in the continuity." He added, "But the issue of indoor air pollution isn't going to die."—MARJORIE SUN