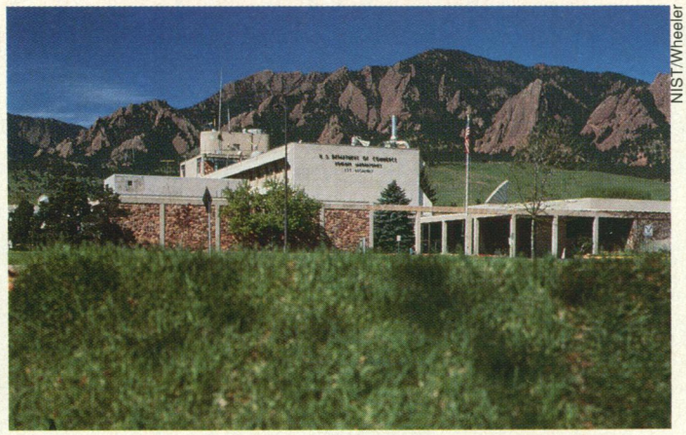
Reorganization, Layoffs Rattle NIST's Colorado Researchers

■ While leaders of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) are boosting the agency's popular technology programs (*Science,* 5 April, p. 21), morale is sinking at one of the research outposts in NIST's empire—at the Chemical Science and Technology Laboratory in Boulder, Colorado.

Staffers in the thermophysics and chemical engineering divisions report that in the past 2 months, many scientists have been hustled into retirement or notified that they will receive a "reduction-in-force" (RIF) pink slip. In all, at least 15 people have been affected, according to one fluid physics theoretician: Four were pressured to retire, seven notified of a RIF, and five told they must move to NIST's main office in Maryland if they want to keep their jobs. In addition, some staffers asked the inspector general to investigate misallocated funds, and after an inquiry in May, two senior scientists were demoted.



NIST/Wheeler

RIF zone: *NIST's lab in Boulder, Colorado.*

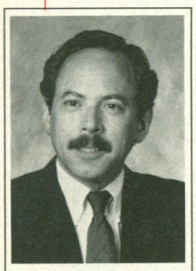
The cutbacks have fallen most heavily on the division of thermophysics, which sets standards for liquid volumes and recently was testing air conditioning refrigerants that might be used to replace ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons. Although the division has received support from the Department of Defense, NASA, and the petroleum industry, it was unable to raise enough outside money this year to satisfy NIST's top managers. "The blood is on the floor now," says one insider.

Harry Hertz, director of the Chemical Science and Technology Lab, says the agency is seeking RIFs for seven scientists because the lab has suffered a "lack of transferred funds from other agencies." Hertz added that the decision to move some employees to Maryland was unrelated to the RIF action. They are all biotechnology researchers, and the agency has decided to consolidate all its biotech programs in a single shop at headquarters.

NIMH Selects a Chief...

■ For the first time since its formation, the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) may be getting a permanent director who is not an MD.

Acting director Alan Leshner, a physiological psychologist, is said to be the front-runner among eight candidates whose names were submitted by a search committee in early May to Fred Goodwin, head of the Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration. *Science* has learned that the other two leading candidates under consideration are psychiatrists Peter Wybrow of the University of Pennsylvania and Benjamin S. Bunney of Yale University.



Alan Leshner

Early in his career, Leshner focused on hormones and behavior, and before he made the transition to NIMH in 1988 he spent 9 years administering research at the National Science Foundation.

...While DOE Readies a Nomination

■ The White House seems ready to send the Senate a nomination next month for director of the office of energy research at the Department of Energy, a post that's been vacant for 17 months.

The leading candidate for the job, Princeton University physicist William Happer Jr., appears to have passed a 6-month series of FBI checks and White House reviews—but there may be one final hurdle to clear before his name can go forward. DOE apparently wants Happer to sever his Princeton ties to avoid any potential conflict-of-interest accusations. (For example, DOE's research chief oversees the fusion program, which funds the Princeton Plasma Physics Lab.)

Happer seems reluctant to give up his academic connections and Happer's supporters suggest a compromise: Let him recuse himself from actions that affect Princeton. Neither the Administration nor Happer would comment last week. Happer may want to avoid offending White House officials, who were said to be upset when *Science* reported earlier (7 December, p. 1508) that he was Energy Secretary James Watkins' choice for the job. This time, Happer told *Science*: "Given the sensitivity of the issue, I would prefer not to discuss it." Meanwhile, he's been seen working as a consultant at DOE.

A Military Landsat?

■ "We're going to have a knockdown, dragout fight this summer" over who will control the next land remote surveillance satellite (Landsat 7), says Alden Colvocoresses, a U.S. Geological Survey mapping specialist and former president of the American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing. Colvocoresses, a strong advocate of the Landsat program, has argued that its photos should be made available at low cost to all comers. But he warns that civilian agencies have become skittish about picking up the tab for the program, while the military has suddenly become more interested in it. The Pentagon realized—as a result of its dependence during the Gulf war on images from Landsat and its French cousin, SPOT—that large area surveillance is essential for wartime operations. As a result, the Pentagon could end up buying the Landsat program, tailoring it to military needs, and controlling the release of data.

An aide to Representative George Brown, Jr. (D–CA) confirms that the Defense Department is becoming more interested in Landsat, and Brown's space science subcommittee will soon examine new military uses for such data. The hearings will also look into the civilian "intelligent map" business, which combines satellite imagery with specialized computer software for such uses as urban planning, utility route laying, and road building. This industry is "exploding," says a congressional aide.

EDITED BY ELIOT MARSHALL