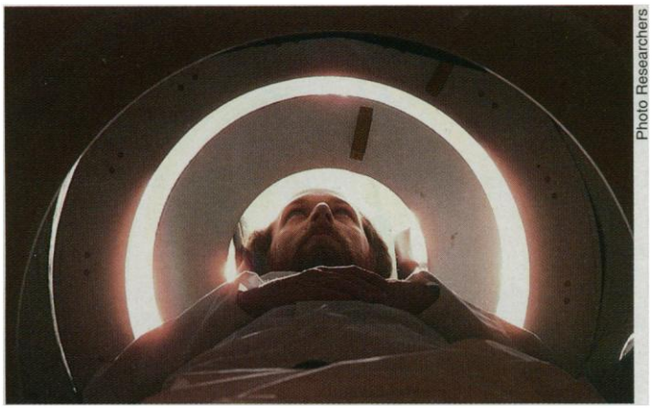


Worth a look, says the EPA: health effects of MRI scanners.

A Call for Better EMF Studies

■ Most studies done on the health hazards of electromagnetic fields (EMFs) are riddled with deficiencies, according to a draft report prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency that is now circulating among EPA scientists.

The draft report, which calls for improvements in all aspects of EMF research, fails to echo an earlier EPA report that sparked a controversy by identifying EMFs as a "probable, but not proven, cause of cancer in humans" (*Science*, 5 October 1990, p. 24). But it does suggest that scientists expand and reproduce existing studies linking EMFs from such sources as power lines to cancer, birth defects, and miscarriages. It also calls for scrutiny of the possible effects of magnetic fields, such as those exerted by magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanners.

Before scientists launch any new epidemiological studies, though, they had better make sure they're accurately measuring EMFs: According to the report, EMF readings are often conducted without adequate supervision or expertise. "In general, measurements have not been appropriate for determining population or occupational exposures."

"We scoped out what we thought were the major issues," says Joe Elder of the EPA's Health Effects Research Laboratory. Elder, who led the 13-person committee of scientists that spent a year writing the review, says the draft will serve as a framework for other organizations' research plans.

British Parliament to Probe Lab Closure?

■ A powerful House of Commons committee now looks likely to investigate the UK Science and Engineering Research Council's (SERC) budget decision to close the renowned Nuclear Structure Facility at Daresbury, near Manchester.

Chris Butler, Daresbury's local Member of Parliament, has sent evidence to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) showing that the plan to close the synchrotron facility by the end of 1992 (*Science*, 15 February, p. 740) will generate only small savings in view of the increased travel costs for scientists who continue their research abroad and the severance payments to workers at Daresbury who will be laid off.

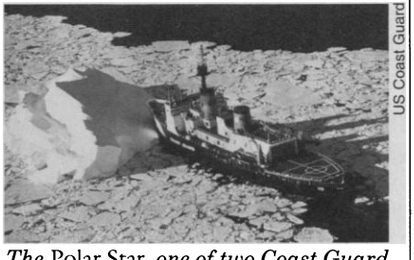
He told *Science* that the decision to close the facility had been made "not so much with a view to finances as to placate vested interests within the scientific community that oppose big science." If the PAC accepts his evidence, the committee's investigative arm, the National Audit Office, will step in.

Butler's move comes just as a report on the future of nuclear structure research in Britain post-Daresbury was delivered to SERC by a committee chaired by Brian Fender of Keele University. The unpublished report—supplied in part to *Science*—recommends a considerable *increase* in funding for nuclear structure work and praises the high standard of British research. That conclusion begs the question of why there was no review of nuclear structure research before the decision to close Daresbury.

A U.S. Arctic Research Vessel?

■ Arctic researchers in the United States have long envied their counterparts in the Soviet Union and Germany, who have ready access to those countries' ice-breaking research ships.

Currently the only two American ice-breakers are under the command of the U.S. Coast Guard and have search and rescue as their primary mission. Now the National Science Foundation (NSF) is studying a plan to remedy the situation by spending up to $50 million over the next 3 years to design and build an ice-capable vessel for U.S. researchers.



The Polar Star, *one of two Coast Guard ice-breakers.*

The Soviets, in particular, have given the U.S. some catching up to do. Their fleet includes three nuclear-powered ice-breakers, and Soviet ships have plowed their way to the North Pole several times—and even taken tourists there for a barbecue.

The proposed NSF vessel would not be able to reach the North Pole; the current plan calls for what officials of the University National Laboratory System, a consortium of universities, call "modest" specs. The 218-foot, 2300-ton vessel would carry up to 30 scientists; endure 90-day, 15,000 mile cruises, and make 3 knots in 3 feet of ice. The ship would cost an estimated $16,000 per day to operate.

So far the House and Senate Appropriations Committees have approved $500,000 for a study of feasibility and the relative cost effectiveness of buying or leasing such a vessel—an option that has been offered by the Louisiana shipbuilder Edison Chousest Offshore. Meanwhile, the Coast Guard has already secured Department of Defense funding for a third ice-breaker of its own, bigger and more expensive than the proposed research vessel the science foundation is eyeing.

Panel Sees Gallo Paper

■ As matters heat up between NIH director Bernadine Healy and congressional investigators (see p. 372), another group that has been at odds with Healy in the past seems to have settled its differences with her. Members of the "Richards panel," a committee of advisers assembled by the National Academy of Sciences to oversee the NIH investigation of intramural AIDS researcher Robert Gallo, had hinted they might resign after Healy refused to let them see the draft report before sending it to Gallo and Mikulas Popovic, another target of the investigation (*Science*, 21 June, p. 1606). Now the panel has finally seen the report, albeit under carefully controlled conditions designed to prevent leaks to the press. While committee members are refusing to discuss the report itself, one member said the committee has decided to remain operative and expects to convene again by September.

EDITED BY TIM APPENZELLER