

## Academy to Wade Into the Electromagnetic Field Quagmire

■ The crowd of researchers studying the possible health effects of electromagnetic fields (EMFs) is about to be joined by another panel of luminaries, this time from the National Academy of Sciences. Language in the conference report accompanying the recently passed energy and water bill (see p. 963) directs the Department of Energy (DOE) to commission a report from the academy on EMF-related health risks, and provides the department with \$600,000 to do so.

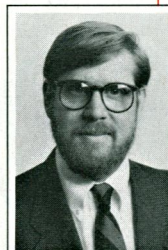
The academy is in a good position to carry out this request, as its radiation effects board has already prepared an EMF study proposal at the request of Representative Joseph McDade (R-PA), a member of the House Appropriations Committee. The study should cover some new ground. According to academy staffer Dennis Mahlum, the preliminary proposal focuses on three possible areas in which EMFs might have health effects: cancer rates; reproductive and child

development effects; and neural effects and learning behavior. Current studies, such as a report the Environmental Protection Agency has been struggling to finalize for the past year, have concentrated almost exclusively on carcinogenic effects.

"I hope we can come up with a real evaluation of where the field is," says Mahlum. "I think we'll expose a lot of loopholes...and if we can define a strategy to attack them in a systematic manner, we'll have made a real contribution."

## FDA "Integrity Review"

■ Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner David Kessler has recently hired a Washington law firm that will conduct a 6-month "integrity review" of the test data that industry routinely submits to the FDA, as well as FDA's procedures for reviewing it.

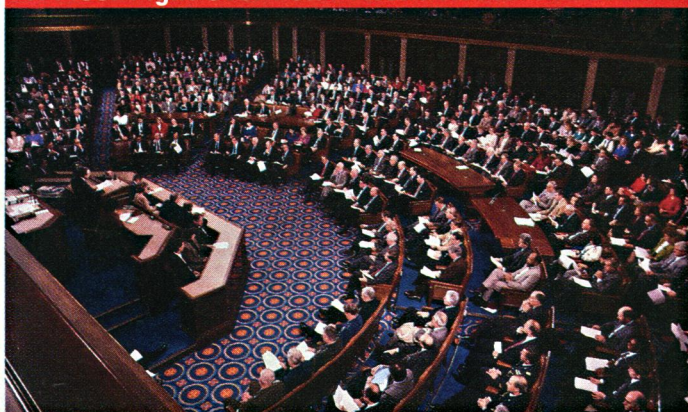


Kessler

The review by Shaw, Pittman, Potts & Trowbridge, which began on 10 July, will examine the FDA's ability to ensure the accuracy of data it receives from drug companies. The law firm also is investigating whether FDA actions on pre-market approval of food and drugs or devices are "fair, impartial, and free from any improper outside influences." Says Shaw, Pittman's lead attorney: "We're trying to determine ways in which the [decision-making] process is vulnerable."

The review was called because "the objectivity and soundness of the agency's decision-making processes have been called into question," according to an FDA statement. It also quotes Kessler as saying, "The system has not always worked as well as it should." An FDA spokesperson had no further comment. Meanwhile, Kessler has also hired a new special assistant for investigations, although a spokesperson says the new investigator is not involved in the Shaw, Pittman probe.

## A Floor Fight Over Fetal Tissue Research Looms in the Senate



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*The ban on federally funded fetal tissue research, overturned by the House in July, will soon be taken up by the Senate.*

■ The ongoing debate in Congress over whether to lift the Bush Administration's ban on federal funds for research on transplanting fetal tissue is likely to break into a fierce floor fight soon after the Senate returns on 10 September. The catalyst will be an amendment to the NIH reauthorization bill that would overturn the ban.

Senators backing the amendment are gearing up to fight an expected conservative-led filibuster intended to block passage of the bill. If they can muster the two-thirds majority needed to cut off debate, they will also be in a good position to override an expected presidential veto. Their success depends on "whether senators can

be convinced of the importance of the research," says a staffer.

Senators looking to sway their colleagues on the issue might take a close look at what happened in the House, which passed the amendment last July. A House staffer says Representative Henry Waxman (D-CA), an amendment supporter, did an impressive job wooing conservatives on the issue. In floor debate before the amendment passed, for example, Waxman said that Parkinson's disease—one of several neurological disorders for which fetal tissue research is thought to be promising—had "robbed" former Representative Morris Udall of "well-deserved, energetic retirement years." Opponents of the research have also gotten in their digs: Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ) has likened fetal tissue research to Nazi experimentation.

## Management Uncertainties at DOE's Office of Energy Research

■ DOE's Office of Energy Research (OER) is in the midst of some management upheavals. The recently appointed director of OER, William Happer Jr.—who wears a second hat as DOE science adviser—is struggling to fill key positions within OER as well as three new deputy science adviser posts created by Energy Secretary James Watkins

(*Science*, 28 June, p. 1775).

Warren Chernock, currently an adviser in the defense programs division, will serve as Happer's deputy science adviser for defense matters. Still to be filled are the deputy slots with responsibility for research and for the national laboratories. Sources say Robert Simon, now staff liaison to a DOE advisory

panel, is under consideration for one of the two posts.

Happer also must fill the post of associate director for basic energy science—the position with responsibility for most of DOE's basic research. The front runner is deputy associate director Louis



Happer

Iannello, currently the acting director.

Finally, OER is awash in rumors that James Decker, a longtime OER deputy director who served as acting director for 11 months until Happer took over, will soon be leaving. Decker could not be reached for comment.