

## Briefings

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

### Whistleblowing for Fun and Profit

Dissatisfied with what he sees as the government's reluctance to punish Stanford University for its alleged padding of research overhead, whistleblower Paul Biddle has taken it upon himself to file a lawsuit on the government's behalf. Stanford's response: It wants Biddle removed from his position as grants negotiator because he could profit from the suit and therefore has a conflict of interest.



Pamela Gentile

**Stanford nemesis.**  
Whistleblower Paul Biddle.

It was Biddle who, as the Navy's accounts officer in charge of negotiating Stanford's government overhead rate, first publicly alleged that Stanford had overcharged the feds by \$200 million. This led to congressional hearings and, ultimately, to the resignation of Stanford President Donald Kennedy.

Biddle could conceivably become a multimillionaire through the action, which he filed last month under the False Claims Act. If the Department of Justice joins the suit (it has 60 days to decide), he could collect up to 15% of the damages from a favorable ruling. If he pursues the case on his own, he stands to gain up to 30%.

That should disqualify him from his job, says Stanford counsel John Schwartz. Federal regulations entitle the univer-

sity to "impartial treatment," Schwartz wrote last month to the chief of naval research. Biddle, he said, "cannot be viewed as impartial." Biddle disagrees. "There is a difference between enforcement and partiality," he told *Science*. "The first charge of an [accounts officer] is to ferret out waste and abuse." Although he will not comment specifically on the lawsuit, Biddle says that pursuing charges on behalf of the government should not disqualify an accounts officer from his job.

Although the Navy has said it does not intend to transfer Biddle, Stanford may soon be seeing the last of him. Biddle, who says his work there is about done, has his eye on a position that would enable him to pursue bigger quarry: a job on the staff of fraudbusting congressman John Dingell (D-MI). "They see problems in other areas, and they would like me to start focusing on those," he says. "I'm very interested in pension funding, and I'm interested in the savings and loan failures."

### The Hunt for Drugs From Nature

"Chemical prospecting"—seeking beneficial substances in hitherto unexplored flora and fauna—is the subject of an unprecedented agreement that has been signed between Merck & Co. and Costa Rica's Instituto Nacional de Biodiversidad.

Engineered in large part by Cornell University biologist Thomas Eisner, who has spent several years trying to get private entities involved in chemical prospecting, and institute director Rodrigo Gamez, a virologist, the collaboration gives Merck the right to new microbial insect and plant drugs that may be found in Costa Rica's nature preserves. In return, the firm will spend \$1 million to help train local biologists. The company has also pledged to donate part of its profits from these activities to the institute's

conservation efforts.

Initial funding was provided last year by a 3-year grant of \$800,000 from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for equipment and training of Costa Rican scientists for "biorational screening." The screening, to be done with Eisner and Cornell chemists Jerrold Meinwald and Jon C. Clardy, will entail looking for new antibiotics in leaves or insect eggs that remain mold-free, for example, or seeking insect repellents in plants untouched by pests.

The Merck agreement amounts to a win-win proposition all around, says Eisner. "The expensive process of conservation will be compensated—in advance—by payments" for the right to commercialize discoveries. At the same time, Costa

Rican labs "could become chemical prospecting training sites for scientists from other developing nations."

### GOES-NEXT to Wait Out Next Round

Weather forecasters anxiously awaiting GOES-NEXT, a new line of weather satellites, might do better predicting next year's weather than guessing when GOES-NEXT will next go.

GOES-7, the only U.S. weather satellite in orbit, is running out of fuel and will begin drifting by July 1992 (*Science*, 12 July, p. 133). NASA, which has been building GOES-NEXT for the Department of Commerce, promised in July that it could end a long series of technical glitches and launch delays

### World's Most Cited Scientists, 1981-1990

	Papers	Citations	Cites per paper
1. Joachim Messing Molecular biology, Rutgers U.	35	18,229	521
2. Michael J. Berridge Biochemistry, Cambridge U.	93	16,004	172
3. Thomas Maniatis Molecular biology, Harvard U.	81	11,167	138
4. Robin F. Irvine Biochemistry, Cambridge U.	108	14,431	134
5. Edward Witten Mathematics, Princeton Institute for Advanced Study	96	12,105	126
6. Peter H. Seeburg Neuroendocrinology, U. Heidelberg	124	14,454	117
7. Yasutomi Nishizuka Biochemistry, Kobe U.	181	20,143	111
8. Bert Vogelstein Oncology, Johns Hopkins U.	99	10,128	102
9. Robert Tijian Biochemistry, Johns Hopkins U.	109	10,334	95
10. Philip Leder Genetics, Harvard U.	115	10,620	92

**Crème de la crème.** The Institute for Scientific Information in Philadelphia has just compiled a list of the scientists who have been most often cited in the past 10 years. Biologists predominate because there are so many of them—which makes the inclusion of mathematical physicist Edward Witten all the more remarkable. Messing racked up his extraordinary total with papers on cloning techniques published in the early '80s.