the other two being the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Friesen, discoverer of the hormone prolactin, has called for a partnership between MRC and all other provincial and national research-supporting bodies, both public and private, in order to get a bigger bang for the research buck.

MRC supports more than 1200 researchers in universities, hospitals, and industry with an annual budget that currently stands at about 240 million Canadian dollars.

## Eccentric Science

The current trend in some circles toward developing "Afrocentric" curricula has very disturbing implications for the teaching of science, according to an anthropologist at Wayne State University.

Bernard Ortiz de Montellano describes a leading example of the problem, in the Portland, Oregon, school system, in the fall 1991 issue of the *Skeptical Inquirer*. It seems that in 1987, the school district published a series of "African-American Baseline Essays," including a science essay called "African and African-American contributions to Science and Technology," that all grade school teachers are expected to incorporate into their classes. The essay was written by Hunter Haviland Adams, who claimed to be a researcher at Argonne National Laboratory, but who is, in fact, an environmental technician. Ortiz de Montellano says Adams is also a member of a group called the "Melanin Scholars," who propose that whites have a defect in their melanin-producing systems, and whose most famous member is Leonard Jeffries of the City University of New York—the man who calls whites "ice people."

The essay, a hodgepodge of myth, religion, folk medicine, and psi phenomena, "is a classical example of pseudoscience, but because of the current pressure on school districts to incorporate multicultural material into the classroom...it has been widely distributed," writes Ortiz de Montellano. The baseline essays "have been adopted or seriously considered" by a number of school districts, including Detroit, Ft. Lauderdale, Atlanta, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. Indeed, says the author, Adams was a featured speaker at a conference last April for Detroit grade school science teachers where he presented fantastic material—such as the notion that the ancient Egyptians used gliders—that was accepted by the audience "without a murmur of dissent."

Ortiz de Montellano told *Science* that he and a few others have been fighting a lonely battle against the excesses of Afrocentric curricula. He compares the movement to creationism, adding that the difference is that "this curriculum will be adopted in big cities." The anthropologist, a longtime advocate of "culturally relevant science" for minorities, believes that most scientists, being uninvolved in pre-college education, are unaware of what's going on. But "when it finally hits the fan, as it surely will," he fears legitimate efforts "will be wiped out too." He is organizing a symposium on the subject at the AAAS annual meeting to be held in Chicago in February.

## Toxic Waste Program Lacks Science Base

The National Research Council came out last month with a blistering review of government policy on hazardous waste site management. Its message, delivered in a report* from a seven-member panel chaired by epidemiologist Anthony Miller of the University of Toronto, is that the Superfund law has created a huge but mindless engineering project in which priorities haven't been sorted out, and no effort has been made to determine whether public health will benefit.

The discovery of buried toxic waste dumps in New York's Love Canal and in Woburn, Massachusetts, led to a big campaign in the 1980s to identify and clean up all such sites in the United States. Since 1980, says the report, the nation has spent about $4.2 billion a year on hazardous waste sites. Yet scarcely anything has been spent to find out whether the management of such dumps is endangering citizens' health, or which of the sites slated for remediation are the most dangerous. The report says there is still "no comprehensive national inventory" of sites, "no site discovery program, no minimum data set on potential human exposure, no adequate system for the early identification of sites for which immediate action to protect public health could be necessary, and no validation...of the site assessment process."

The report goes on to make a strong pitch for investing in better research on exposure to toxic agents in the environment, and contains recommendations for improving understanding of toxic dangers and targeting the remedial work more effectively. There is "sufficient evidence that hazardous wastes have produced serious health effects in some populations" already, warns the report, adding that since chemical contamination is still spreading in groundwater systems, the risks could be greater in the future.

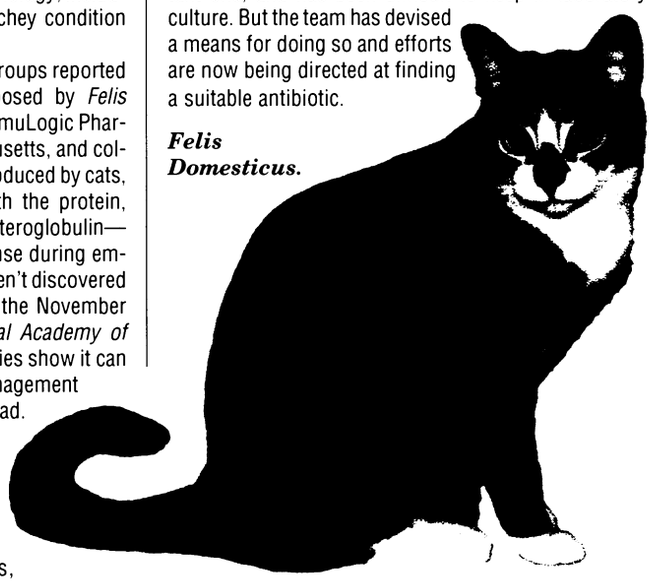
*"Environmental Epidemiology," available from the National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Avenue NW, Washington DC 20418.

## Relief for Cat Persons?

As the term "cat person" suggests, many people find cats irresistible. But along with feline charms come some irritating—even dangerous—forms of pathology, including allergic responses and the sweaty, achey condition known as "cat scratch fever."

But last month two separate research groups reported advances that may reduce the perils posed by *Felis domesticus*. Jay P. Morgenstern of the ImmuLogic Pharmaceutical Corp. in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and colleagues have cloned the major allergen produced by cats, called Fel dI. Cats' skins are coated with the protein, which bears some resemblance to rabbit uteroglobulin—believed to limit maternal immune response during embryo implantation. So far, researchers haven't discovered the allergen's biological function. But in the November issue of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, they suggest that if further studies show it can modulate immune processes, better management of cat-allergic patients may be down the road.

Meanwhile a team at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta has, for the first time, characterized the bacterium that causes cat scratch fever. The malady, which strikes about 6000 people a year, causes fever, swollen lymph glands, anorexia, and general malaise, and can last as long as a couple of months. The organism, *Afipia felis*, is a resistant one, and has been difficult to keep in laboratory culture. But the team has devised a means for doing so and efforts are now being directed at finding a suitable antibiotic.



***Felis Domesticus.***

JEAN MARX