

Briefings

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Databank on Chernobyl Disaster

Scientists and writers researching the huge fallout of information about the Soviet Union's 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident can now put a complete bibliography of the literature into their PCs. For \$395, they can buy ChernoLit, created for the Department of Energy (DOE) at DOE's Pacific Northwest Laboratory in Richland, Washington. The database comes on 5.25- and 3.5-inch diskettes for use in IBM-compatible computers. It consists of 4500 articles and reports, collected from around the world, on the accident and its consequences for human health and the environment. ChernoLit comes with its own search software, and each item includes a complete citation and an abstract. Lab spokesman Terry Brown says the accident, while tragic, produced "the first real-world data" for a nuclear power plant disaster. "Previously, all we had were models, theoretical calculations, and simulations."

Review for Army Whistleblower

Army physicist Aldric Saucier, who has been a burr under the Pentagon's saddle with his criticism of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) research program, has won a Defense Department review of his allegations of misconduct by senior SDI officials.

On 28 February the Federal Office of Special Counsel, an independent agency set up in 1979 to protect whistleblowers, determined that Saucier's case is substantial enough to warrant investigation. Saucier has been contending for several years that Star Wars research has been plagued by waste, fraud, and politicking that has distorted research priorities. The Army responded, he

says, by demoting him from a senior management position in the SDI program to a lesser post at the Army Ballistic Missile Defense Command.

Saucier subsequently gained a champion in Representative John Conyers Jr. (D-MI), whose subcommittee on national security has been investigating the SDI program. But last month, the Army tried to fire Saucier. When Conyers objected, the Army suspended the dismissal pending a 2-week review. Conyers has now gone a step further, asking Defense Secretary Richard Cheney to hold off action until both reviews have been completed.

The Army says Saucier was dismissed after doing an "unacceptable" job on a report about tracking and shooting down missiles. But Conyers agrees with Saucier that the dismissal was an act of "retaliation." So does the Government Account-

ability Project, a public-interest group that is suing the Army on the grounds that Saucier's firing is illegal under the 1989 Whistleblower Protection Act. Pentagon officials have declined to comment while the matter is under investigation.

Population Alarm

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and the Royal Society of London ordinarily don't do much together except meet every couple of years. But the two organizations have become worried enough about world population growth that last month they put out their first joint statement: a warning that "if current predictions of population growth prove accurate and patterns of human activity on the planet remain unchanged, science and technology may not be able to prevent either

irreversible degradation of the environment or continued poverty for much of the world."

Present trends "should make even those most optimistic about future scientific progress pause..." says the statement, noting that population is growing faster than was forecast by the United Nations in 1984, and that, under conservative estimates, it is now expected almost to double by 2050.

Peter Raven, NAS home secretary and head of the Missouri Botanical Garden, says that behind the statement is the fact that "the world scientific community has drifted away" from population issues over the past decade or so—and "many, many scientists feel there's a need to refocus" on the subject. Nonetheless, at present, says Raven, "scientists in general are doing a lot more talking about global warming and ozone depletion than they are about the basic forces that are driving those things."

The joint statement was issued in anticipation of the UN Conference on Environment and Development, to be held in Brazil in June. But population issues may get a less politicized forum at a conference, announced in the joint statement, planned for May 1993 that is to be hosted in Stockholm by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

Big Red's Computer Virus Hatchery

As computer managers braced for an explosion of the Michelangelo virus last week, Cornell University clamped down on a local infection of its own—the second major case in the past 4 years. M. Stuart Lynn, Cornell's vice president for information services, announced that the university has tracked down two 19-year-old virus-hatchers employed by the school's own computer office. Lynn brought the state police and the FBI in after the discovery of the virus on 14 February, and it was traced in record time—leading to the 24 February arraignment of two sophomores. They were accused

Painting the Brain



This colorful three-dimensional view of the human brain was produced by Phil Mercurio of the San Diego Supercomputer Center using a software animation package called Wavefront that processed data from a normal brain. The data were collected by neuroscientist Robert B. Livingston of the University of California, San Diego, who filmed slices of a brain that had been encased in a paraffin block and then shaved off in thin layers. The images were digitized and different colors were assigned to different brain features. The result shows the thalamus (yellow); the hypothalamus (dark green); the amygdala (pink); the cortex (gray); the cerebellum (magenta); the brainstem (transparent blue); the corpus callosum (brown); the caudate (green); Broca's area (dark blue); Wernicke's area (cyan); the red nucleus (red); mammalary bodies (dark orange); the pituitary gland (bright orange); the substantia nigra (black); and the subthalamic nucleus (yellow-green).