million. But that still leaves a $2.3 million shortfall. To make up the balance, the school expects to "enhance its revenue stream from foundations and industrial sources," says Suzanne Rauffenbart, associate dean for public affairs. She says research grants brought by new faculty members—now being recruited for a new research building to open next September—are also expected to help.

School financial officers are attributing the deficit to reductions in funds from the National Institutes of Health, as well as the fact that a new cap on indirect cost reimbursement reduced the expected revenue by $2 million. The accountants warn that, in the absence of cost-cutting measures, the deficit for the coming academic year is projected to be even worse: It could reach $6 million by 1993.

Top Science Jobs Lose Appeal

It's getting harder and harder to fill the top 78 presidentially appointed science policy-making jobs, according to a new National Academy of Sciences report.* Why? "The single most important factor" is the welter of restrictions on the kinds of work appointees can do after they get out of government, says the academy panel headed by Kenneth W. Dam, IBM executive and former deputy secretary of state.

Other disincentives to taking top science jobs are the low salaries, financial disclosure restrictions, the lack of prestige that attends public service these days, and "the perception of inappropriate ideological 'litmus tests.'"

The problem has grown worse during the Bush Administration, the report notes. Science and technology positions have been staying vacant an average of 9 months under Bush, compared with 6 months in the Reagan years. And recruiters sometimes have to go through a couple of dozen candidates before they find one who will say yes.

The report recommends that to make top science jobs more attractive, ethics rules should be made more clear and consistent, and restrictions on post-government employment should be narrowed. To insulate such jobs from politics, the report suggests establishing fixed terms of service and exempting some posts from the harrowing Senate confirmation process.

The problem of luring prime talent into important science posts is no joke, says the report. "If the situation continues, the government's ability to make key decisions in the face of rapid scientific and technological change...will be very seriously affected."

Science and Technology Leadership in American Government, by a panel of the Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy of the National Academies of Science and Engineering and the National Institute of Medicine. Available for $12.95 plus $3 shipping from the National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20418.

Asbestos Regs to Be Re-examined

In 1989, after spending several years and millions of dollars gathering evidence linking asbestos to lung cancer and other diseases, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulators thought they'd built an iron-clad case against the material. So they imposed a ban on virtually all new asbestos-containing products.

But recently, the open-and-shut case has opened again. Last October, in response to a petition from firms that make products containing asbestos, the fifth circuit federal appeals court in New Orleans struck down the ban, citing EPA's failure to give industry a chance to rebut revised estimates on the health benefits of the ban, and its failure to evaluate the safety of asbestos substitutes such as polyvinyl chloride.

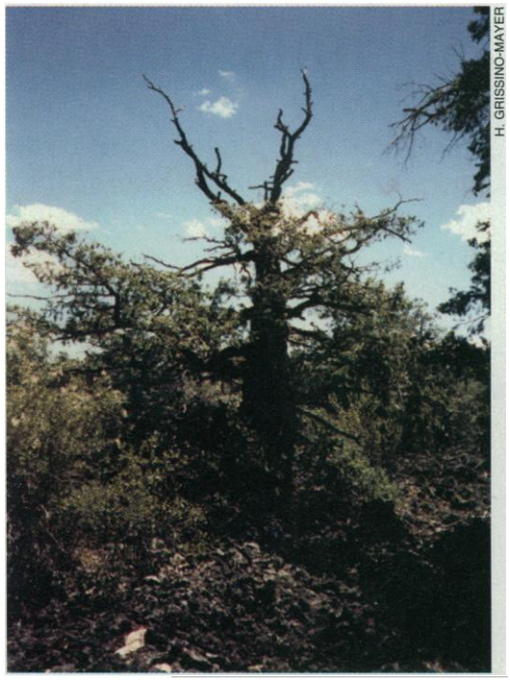
Last week, Linda Fisher, EPA assistant administrator for pesticides and toxic substances, revealed during a congressional hearing that EPA wanted to appeal the court ruling to the Supreme Court, but the Justice Department decided against it. So, EPA has instead begun a product-by-product review that might keep the door open for certain uses of asbestos. These include products such as asbestos cement used in water main pipes and asbestos brake pads designed for older cars. The ban on new use of asbestos insulation in buildings is unaffected by the ruling.

Precolumbian Trees

Paleoclimatologists and ecologists now have a surprising new database of the climatic history of the arid Southwest: a stand of centuries-old Douglas-fir trees recently discovered in the lava fields of El Malpais National Monument in western New Mexico. One of these trees—called "1062" because dendrochronologists estimate that it sprouted 4 years before William the Conqueror invaded England—is the oldest accurately dated living member of that species.

Henri Grissino-Mayer of the University of Arizona says the stand of hoary trees was discovered a couple of years ago by a park ranger, who notified the university—which happens to be regarded as the leading dendrochronology center in the United States. Last summer, Grissino-Mayer and his colleague Rex Adams took four cores from the 9-meter-tall 1062, which they initially thought could be no more than 700 years old. Now they believe there may be even older ones living in the area, quite in defiance of conventional wisdom. "The world's oldest living trees, the bristlecone pines in California [which are as much as 4844 years old], all grow in very high, dry, and cold environments," says Grissino-Mayer. The lava fields, however, are lower—at an altitude of 2070 meters—and the climate warmer "than any place Douglas-firs ought to grow."

Grissino-Mayer says the lava fields may actually be an ideal environment for 1062 and its neighbors: Because nothing else will grow there, the site is protected both from fire and from competitors, and the miles of jagged lava keep human and animal predators away. He predicts that the find will spur dendrochronologists to start searching other lava flows—such as those in Oregon, Idaho, and California—for old trees, and will encourage ecologists to probe for the secrets of the trees' survival in what is for most plants a very hostile environment.



Old-timer. *Recently discovered Douglas-fir stands 6 meters high, with a diameter of 80 centimeters. Birthdate: 1235 A.D.*