edited by RICHARD STONE

A Plan for Soviet Nuclear Waste

If environmentalist forces are successful, the Russian government may soon establish the country's first comprehensive program for dealing with nuclear waste. Later this month the Russian parliament, back from its summer recess, is expected to begin considering a bill on this topic. A draft copy obtained by *Science* indicates that Russia is starting with the basics: It orders the government to develop a means of insulating waste from the environment, to form a national waste processing program, and to create a registry for tracking where spent atomic fuel is stored or buried.

The bill comes on the heels of a November 1991 decree by Russian President Boris Yeltsin to step up efforts to deal with nuclear waste issues and to create a government registry of nuclear waste disposal sites by 1 January 1993. The former Soviet Union has come under fire from environmentalists for dumping low- and intermediate-level nuclear wastes in the Arctic Ocean and for improperly storing waste at sites in the southern Urals and Belarus. Adding to the bill's urgency is the fact that Russia is considering sites for underground repositories for high-level waste at Tomsk, Krasnoyarsk, Chelyabinsk, and on the Kola Peninsula.

After setting out a tough agenda for the struggling Russian government, the bill calls on it to solicit international help. Indeed, here Russian legislators are already ahead of the game. A team of U.S. experts (including John Ahearne, executive director of the Sigma Xi research society and a former chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission) has been advising legislators on how to craft the bill, and earlier this week returned to Moscow for a final pow-wow before the bill is debated by the full parliament.

SOVFOTO

Waste land. The former Soviet Union currently stores much of its nuclear waste where it's generated, including at the Chernobyl plant.

NIH Dabbles in the Unconventional

Unconventional medical practices such as massage, acupuncture, and herbal therapy will soon get some serious attention from mainstream medical scientists. Earlier this week the National Institutes of Health (NIH) nudged some of these alternative therapies down the road to respectability by hosting a workshop to identify research opportunities and to begin to develop methods to assess their safety and efficacy.

Why has NIH strayed from the beaten research track? Because Congress told it to. A 1992 report of the Senate Appropriations Committee stated that it was "not satisfied that the conventional medical community as symbolized by NIH has fully explored the potential that exists in unconventional medical practices." The report points out that some common procedures—such as radiation therapy for cancer—once had been shunned, too.

In the past, NIH has had a hard time assessing alternative therapies because they often perform poorly in clinical trials, says Jennifer Jacobs, a University of Washington epidemiologist and family practitioner of homeopathy. But Jacobs, a member of an NIH advisory panel on unconventional medicine, argues that case studies might provide a reliable yardstick for physical procedures such as acupuncture, and double-blind studies might adequately assess substances such as garlic for fungal infections and maitake mushrooms for Kaposi's sarcoma.

Some NIH mainstreamers are biting their tongues and adopting a wait-and-see approach to this new wave. "You don't know what you're going to find under the particular rock you turn over," says one NIH official. But "as money gets tighter, people tend to go for the tried and true."

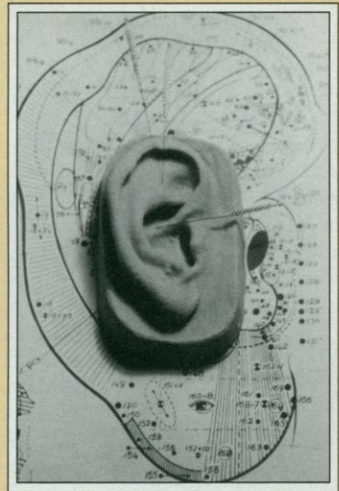

PHOTO RESEARCHERS

Sound therapy? NIH gives unconventional medicine (above, acupuncture of the ear) a hearing.

France and Italy to Build Euro LIGO

A U.S. project to detect gravitational waves may soon gain some international collaborators. In the next few weeks, France and Italy are expected to authorize the construction of their own facility to catch these large waves—which so far exist only in theory—in Cascina, a town in Central Italy near Pisa.

Last February, the National Science Foundation designated Livingston, Louisiana, and Hanover, Washington, as sites for the Large Interferometer Gravitational Wave Observatory, better known as LIGO, which U.S. officials hope to have up and running in 1997. But astrophysicists need at least one site distant from LIGO to verify the source of the ripples in space that Einstein first predicted, and to examine such characteristics as their polarization, says Caltech physicist Kip Thorne. "We're quite dependent on Europe moving forward to get the full value of our experiment," he says.

French officials have given the go-ahead for the Mediterranean version of LIGO, dubbed VIRGO, and Italy is expected to soon follow suit. Construction of the $90 million facility would start in 1993 and finish by 1997. And there's more good news for gravitational-wave hunters: England and Germany are considering plans to build a detector in Germany near Hannover.

Academy Rumblings

Science has learned that a nominating committee has chosen a final candidate for president of the National Academy of Sciences, said to be Bruce M. Alberts, professor of biochemistry at the University of California, San Francisco. The choice will be announced in November and the ballots will be sent out to members in December. Under the academy's rules, Frank Press, the current president, must retire after his second term, on 30 June 1993, ending a 12-year tour of service.