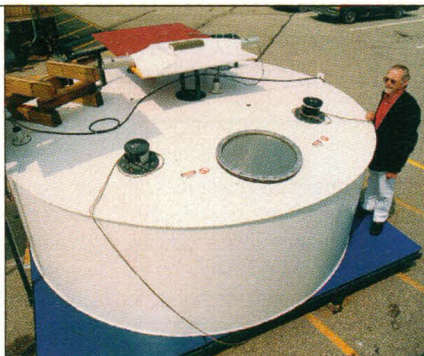


U.S. Vies for Cosmic Ray Detector Site

As *Science* went to press, researchers from 19 countries were gathering in San Rafael, Argentina, to vote on where in the Northern Hemisphere to place a giant array of detectors for studying the most energetic—and enigmatic—particles smashing into Earth's atmosphere from space. Collaborators on the \$100 million Pierre Auger Project were set to choose between candidate sites in Spain, Mexico, and the United States for an array to be laid over an area roughly the size of Rhode Island.

While U.S. participants are backing their candidate site in Utah, "I wouldn't want to commit" to whether it or another country's location is the front-runner, said Paul Mantsch, a collaborator at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, late last week. U.S. researchers chose their site last month, an area about 100 miles south of Salt Lake City, says Mantsch. Among other advantages, he notes, the Utah site enjoys good access by road and consists of 80% government land.

This new sensor will complement an array in the Southern Hemisphere which the collaboration decided 9 months ago to place near Mendoza, Argentina (*Science*, 22 December 1995, p. 1923). The two arrays will scan the entire sky for the huge showers of particles that result when ultrahigh-energy cosmic rays crash into Earth's atmosphere. Researchers hope to unravel the mechanism



Catching rays. Project to study cosmic particles will employ these detectors.

by which the rays are flung from space by detecting light generated by the particles as they plunge into 1600 water tanks spaced over 3000 square kilometers.

If the Utah site is chosen, says Mantsch, the U.S. members will pledge to sweeten the pot by requesting \$25 million in funding for the project from the Department of Energy and the National Science Foundation. But the project's spokesperson, physicist James Cronin of the University of Chicago, cautions that "much can happen" to influence the voting, which was set for 12 September.

Biotech Industry Heads Off Patent Threat

Although biotech companies have been lobbying this year for an overhaul of the Food and Drug Administration, the chances are slight that an FDA bill will pass in the few days left in this Congress. But companies are celebrating at least one victory: They stopped legislation that would have limited patents on certain

biomedical inventions.

Industry was concerned about a bill proposed by Congressman Greg Ganske (R-PA) and Senator Bill Frist (R-TN) intended to prevent physicians from patenting and collecting royalties on medical procedures, such as a new technique for eye surgery. But according to Carl Feldbaum, president of the Biotechnology Industry Organization, the bill also threatened patents for gene therapies, diagnostic techniques, and new uses of products—possibly affecting up to one-third of all future biotech patents. In July, Ganske attached the legislation to a spending bill that has passed the House and is awaiting action in the Senate.

After meeting for months with congressional staffers and medical groups backing the bill, biotech advocates reached an agreement 2 weeks ago: The Senate and House compromise bill will contain language specifically exempting biotechnology patents. "We're satisfied with the amended bill," Feldbaum says.

As for reform plans to speed FDA approval of drugs—the subject of separate bills in the House and Senate—Feldbaum notes that the Senate bill's sponsor, Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS), has been promised time this month on the Senate floor for her proposal. "We're hoping that be-

tween now and 27 September that it will be presented to the House" and approved, Feldbaum says. However, he adds, as for the chance of success, "I wouldn't put a number on it."

Republicans Bash DOE Bashers

Republicans' push to abolish the Department of Energy (DOE) encountered fierce opposition last week from within their own party. "It's bordering on the absurd," thundered Senator Pete Domenici (R-NM) at a hearing on 4 September to discuss a House bill to do away with DOE. Domenici, a champion of DOE labs within his state, vowed to resist transferring weapons labs to the military "with every ounce of Senate capability I have."

The bill, sponsored by Representative Todd Tiahrt (R-KS), promises to save \$20 billion over 6 years by transferring DOE's three weapons labs to the Defense Department (DOD) and closing or farming out other labs and missions. The bill has been languishing in the House, so Tiahrt appeared before a Senate committee to try to win converts to his cause.

His welcome, however, was anything but warm. Domenici, Senator Larry Craig (R-ID) (also from a state with a DOE lab), and Democrats attacked the bill, questioning the potential savings and criticizing the idea of giving control of the nuclear weapons stockpile to DOD. Democrats defended Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary's own plan for saving money. Senator Bennett Johnston (D-LA) dismissed the proposal as "more about political tactics and emotional posturing" than about achievable savings.

Tiahrt countered that O'Leary had proposed major cuts only because of Republican pressure. He conceded, however, that with few legislative days left, his bill has no chance of passing this Congress. On that, Domenici agreed. "This bill's not going anywhere this year," he said.

New Charity for Clinical Heart Research?

Funding for cardiology research may soon get a big shot in the arm. The Donald W. Reynolds Foundation in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which has a \$1 billion endowment from a media executive who suffered from cardiovascular disease, has assembled a blue-ribbon panel of cardiologists to recommend ways that it might have a major impact on this research area, says Executive Director Donald Pray.

By law, the Reynolds Foundation must donate at least \$50 million annually, and most of its gifts so far have paid for facilities. Although no decision has been made about how much the foundation might spend on cardiovascular research, the chair

of the blue-ribbon panel, Thomas Smith of Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, says it "could have a big impact in a short time" in a field squeezed by changes in the health care system. The foundation has talked to the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, which funds basic research, but Pray says "we want to do something that has a little more immediate impact," most likely by supporting clinical research.

The prospect "sounds wonderful," says François Abboud of the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, a member of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's advisory council.