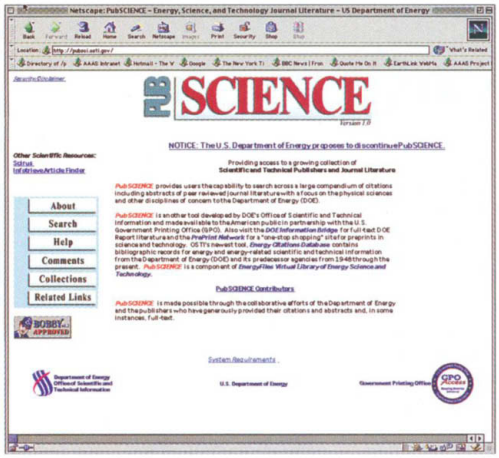
ety, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (publisher of *Science*) cooperated with DOE, PubSCIENCE never gathered the momentum that its medical counterpart did. "I think one of the advantages PubMED always had over PubSCIENCE was that it was always very comprehensive in the disciplines that it covers," says Warnick. "PubSCIENCE was never as comprehensive."



Pulling the Pub. A federal Web site for the physical sciences is about to go dark.

The diversity of the physical sciences also made it hard for PubSCIENCE to win a toehold in a very competitive market. "With the whole dot-com industry, it's not so easy to establish something that attracts a lot of traffic," says Frank Vrancken Peeters, the managing director for Elsevier's ScienceDirect service, which includes Scirus.

Peeters speculates that the difference between physicists and medical researchers might have contributed to PubSCIENCE's demise. "The physical sciences are much more fragmented, more niche," he says. Monica Bradford, *Science*'s executive editor, says that PubSCIENCE "wasn't around long enough to establish itself." Although she says she's "personally disappointed" that it failed, "I don't think it will be missed."

—CHARLES SEIFE

SCIENTIFIC EXCHANGES

U.S. Visa Crackdown Disrupts Meetings

The U.S. State Department has begun performing extra security checks on visa applications from scientists and technologists from around the world, delaying visa decisions by weeks. The delays have led to the cancellation or rescheduling of several recent meetings by U.S. organizations. Most heavily affected so far have been scientists from the former Soviet Union (FSU) and China who are involved in research on weapons or other areas deemed sensitive to national security.

The visa crackdown is a late response to last fall's terrorist attacks, a State Department official told *Science*. Organizations first began noticing the delays in late spring, but it wasn't until last month that most U.S. nonproliferation experts learned that any foreign scientist could be subjected to such checks. The delays stem from more frequent interviews with visa applicants in U.S. embassies in their home countries as well as new measures, such as stiff vetting by the FBI and other intelligence agencies. "This is to ensure that the wrong people aren't slipping through the cracks," says a State Department official.

Ironically, the new security measures could have a negative impact, some say, by making it more difficult to interact with foreign scientists whose skills the U.S. government hopes to divert from weapons programs to civilian activities. "A big part of our engagement program is getting these scientists over here to the West" to work on nonproliferation programs, says the State Department official. To maintain regular contact with such researchers, he says, "we'll have to go to them more often than having them come to us."

The changes have dealt a sharp blow to plans by the U.S. Civilian Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) in Arlington, Virginia, to bring together select groups from the FSU and the United States to discuss how to protect civilian populations from terrorist acts. One recent workshop to discuss detection of toxins and pathogens using bioluminescent alarm signals was pushed back from the beginning to the end of August after five FSU scientists failed to obtain U.S. visas. With no resolution in sight and despite the fact that "State and Embassy Moscow are doing everything they can to help," says CRDF senior vice president Charles T. Owens, "we may have to resort to holding the symposium by video link."

No entry. Some weapons scientists are having a hard time obtaining visas to visit the United States.

So far, the consequences have been relatively minor: canceled plane tickets, lost hotel reservation fees, and the like. But some observers fear that could change for the worse if the proposed U.S. Department of Homeland Security assumes responsibility for screening visa applicants. "We don't expect an upsurge in denials," says the State Department official, but visa processing time could be lengthened from weeks to months.

Routine scientific exchanges appear to be less affected by the additional scrutiny. The U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), for example, reports that none of the collaborations involving foreign scientists that it supports appears to have been affected. However, one NSF official notes that the Chinese Embassy has cited changes in visa processing practices as a reason for delays in the movement of Chinese scholars to the United States. A Department of Energy (DOE) official says that the agency was told a few weeks ago that the State Department's consular division is "tightening up" further on Chinese scientists—"although restrictions were already pretty tight," he says.

For CRDF, the first headache came in early July, when two key Russian scientists failed to obtain visas in time for a workshop on portable ion-trap mass spectrometers for the detection of chemical and biological warfare agents. "This workshop gave us an initial clue that there was a problem," says CRDF president Gerson Sher. In the weeks since, five more of 11 planned antiterrorism workshops, including meetings on anthrax assays and detection of explosives in baggage, have been disrupted—at a "not inconsequent" cost of $35,000 to CRDF, says Owens. DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration has had to postpone several meetings, too. "We just have to plan earlier," says Barry Gale, director of DOE's Office of International Science and Technology Cooperation.

Visa policies are likely to be discussed next month at a seminar in Washington, D.C., for science attachés from around the world, sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (publisher of *Science*). Although attendees hope to hear a clarification of the Bush Administration's policy from a White House official, no one is predicting a return to a time when obtaining a visa for a foreign scientist was routine.

—RICHARD STONE

CREDIT: (BOTTOM) REUTERS NEWMEDIA INC./CORBIS