

## news in brief

**Windscale issues emergency advice:** Residents living within a mile of the UK Windscale nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in Cumbria have been issued with leaflets explaining emergency procedures in the event of any serious incident there. Similar booklets have also been sent to farmers within 10 miles of the plant. The move follows a recommendation by Justice Parker — whose inquiry report last year gave the go-ahead for expansion at the plant — that local residents be informed of all emergency procedures. At first explanatory leaflets were sent to local libraries and the media. Now these have been issued to the residents nearest to the plant to keep for reference. The booklets give details of evacuation plans, information broadcast procedures and medical arrangements in case of serious radiation leaks.

**Harrisburg re-opening depends on residents' mental health:** The mental health of residents living near the damaged Three Mile Island nuclear plant is a matter of "real and substantial concern" and should be carefully considered before allowing even the unaffected reactor on the site to be restarted, the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission has announced. Leonard Bickwit, NRC general counsel, said the commission felt that psychological, sociological and economic distress should all be considered in hearing the licensee's application to restart the plant, a decision unlikely to be taken by the NRC until the middle of next year. He added that a ruling on the mental health of residents could be a landmark in regulatory legal process.

This pronouncement contrasts with the recent publication by the operating company, General Public Utilities, of a plan to resume operations at the plant. This would involve venting into the air some of the radioactivity now contaminating the reactor chamber. However, although the quantities proposed would only involve releasing one tenth of a millirem of gamma radiation, compared with the 83 released at the height of the station emergency, it is unlikely the proposal will be given the go-ahead without strong legal and political opposition. And even if approved, it is unlikely that the plant could resume operations before June 1983.

**Draft code to protect asbestos workers:** A consultative document has been produced by the UK Health and Safety Commission on a proposed code of practice for workers dealing with asbestos insulation. The proposals are an extension and clarification of existing legislation. They include proposals for improving asbestos dust containment, waste disposal, personal protection and training for insulation workers. Industry and trade unions have until 30 November to give their view before a final code of practice is drawn up.



"Perhaps we'll have some benefit from our own technology now!"

**Indian rocket crash:** India's first rocket designed to put a satellite into orbit crashed into the Indian Ocean during a test flight. The launcher flew for only 15 minutes after blasting off from Sriharikota space research centre in South India. The test failure is a setback for the Indian space programme which has been preparing for greater independence from the

Soviet Union, whose launchers it uses at present. It was intended to put a satellite, Rohini Satellite-1, into orbit later this year using the SLV-3 rocket — which is similar to the US Scout rocket and uses solid propellants in all its four stages. Once the SLV-3 is successfully completed, India intends to launch a series of Rohini satellites — to be followed by a more ambitious programme of communications satellites.

**Ariane delay:** The first flight of Europe's independent space launcher, Ariane, has been postponed by about a month. The launch was scheduled for 3 November but because of problems with ball-bearing mounts for first and second stage engines, this has now been put back until the end of November or the beginning of December. However, a European Space Agency said the difficulty had not been a major one and had now been overcome.

**African venereology conference opens:** The first African International Conference on Sexually Transmitted Diseases was due to open at Ibadan University, Nigeria yesterday. More than 200 doctors and researchers were expected to attend and the opening speaker, Dr Duncan Catterall, described the event as "an historic day in African medicine". It had taken three years' campaigning to arrange the conference he said, and the agreement to stage it indicated that the African governments now recognised that sexually transmitted diseases were a major problem. Although no statistics were available, Dr Catterall believed the diseases were now widespread throughout the continent and there was an urgent need to develop a common policy towards treatment and contact tracing. In particular, the uncontrolled use of penicillin in many African countries was leading to the development of resistant strains which in future could prove very difficult and expensive to cure.

**Two sponsors required for animal research under new Bill:** Lord Halsbury's Bill on the protection of laboratory animals, due for its second reading in the House of Lords on 25 October (16 August, page 534), will require an applicant for a licence to do research on animals to have two sponsors, Lord Halsbury announced last week. One must be the applicant's supervisor, and the other an independent expert in the procedures to be used, who will also advise on alternative techniques. After the licence has been granted, the new licensee will have to work for a probationary period under the supervision of an experienced licensee. These rules will apply to those working with animals to produce vaccine and serums as well as those "experimenting" with animals.

The licensing of institutions where "procedures" on animals are carried out should ensure that stolen pets do not end up in laboratories, Lord Halsbury explained at a press conference on the Bill last week. The conference came to an abrupt end after interruptions from members of the Animal Welfare Society and the National Anti-vivisection Society.

Lord Halsbury's is not the only Bill on laboratory animals shortly to be considered by Parliament. Peter Fry MP will be putting another Bill to the House of Commons for its first reading shortly after the start of the next session.

**US climate programme sets goals:** Three major areas of activity — climate impact assessment, climate system research, and climate data, information and services — have been earmarked for the newly-established National Climate Programme, it was announced in the US. The programme was established by Congress last year and will coordinate the work of various federal, state, private, academic and international organisations. It is also planned that several experimental climate forecast groups should be set up as part of the programme, which will cost a total \$114.2 million next year. These will develop, evaluate and test new climate forecasting methods.

**Soviet cosmonauts land:** Cosmonauts Vladimir Lyakhov and Valerii Ryumin have returned to Earth after a record 175-day flight aboard the Salyut-6 space station. First reports say they are healthy owing to an "exceptionally conscientious" attitude to exercise — unlike the ground crew, who according to Flight Controller A.S. Eliseev "have been suffering a certain amount of weariness".