

UN brokers treaty banning persistent organic pollutants

Washington A class of widely used and highly persistent chemical pollutants is to be banned by 122 countries under an international treaty agreed to in Johannesburg last week.

In a meeting organized by the United Nations Environment Programme, diplomats established measures to control persistent organic pollutants, commonly known as POPs. The legally binding contract will regulate the production, shipping, disposal and use of eight pesticides, two industrial chemicals, and two industrial or combustion by-products.

Exempted from the immediate ban are DDT, still heavily used in the developing world to control malaria mosquitoes, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), which make up parts of old equipment still in use. Use of these two chemicals will be phased out over the next five years.

Participating governments will formally adopt and sign the treaty at a diplomatic conference in Stockholm next May.

Max Planck Society asks for promises of good practice

Munich Germany's Max Planck Society has announced that scientists at its 78 institutes will have to sign an agreement to abide by new guidelines for good practice.

The rules require researchers to archive their data in an accessible form for ten years and to describe experimental protocols in enough detail for them to be reproduced. They disallow honorary authorship on research papers, and require that young scientists are properly supported and supervised.

The society hopes that the guidelines will help to prevent scientific fraud, several cases of which have recently shaken the German scientific community (see *Nature* 398, 13–17; 1999).

International deal to phase out LD50 test

London The LD50 (lethal dose to 50%) test, which has been criticized for its killing of research animals, is to be abolished.

The test, which requires at least 20 rats to receive escalating doses of a trial chemical until half die, will be phased out over the next year. The test is used to assess the potential hazards of chemicals to humans and mammals from accidental exposure.

The United States and Japan originally opposed a ban, but they finally agreed to three alternative tests that reduce the number of animal deaths.

The agreement was announced last week



Death rodent: the United States and Japan have agreed to new chemical tests that kill fewer rats.

by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

European Commission speeds up grant decisions

Brussels Researchers applying for European Commission grants will learn of their fate more quickly, following last week's approval of new rules for processing grants.

Currently, applicants are sometimes kept in suspense for months, because European Commissioners are required to rubber-stamp the decisions on projects.

But the commission will now allow researchers to be informed much more quickly. Achilles Mitsos, director-general of the research directorate, will have the power to inform them immediately of the results of their projects' peer review.

White House sets misconduct rules

Washington The White House last week issued requirements for addressing scientific misconduct cases. Agencies have one year to come into compliance with them.

After years of debate, the Office of Science and Technology Policy has finalized a refined definition of misconduct, new data requirements, and guidelines for enforcement. The guidelines are intended to harmonize the procedures used for investigating misconduct at federal research agencies.

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Last-ditch meeting fails to bridge climate divide

London Negotiators from Europe and the United States met in Ottawa last week in a last-ditch bid to close the gap that had separated them at the negotiations on climate change last month in The Hague (see *Nature* 408, 503–504; 2000). But they failed to do so.

The meeting, which was also attended by representatives from Canada and Japan, had attempted to reconcile the US demand to be allowed to include agricultural practices when assessing its carbon emission with the European Union's argument that this would reduce the pressure to cut carbon emissions.

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A spokesman for the British government says that "some technical issues" were clarified at the Ottawa talks, but no substantial progress was reported. European environment ministers will meet in Brussels next week to discuss their strategy on reaching an accord with the United States.

Leibniz prizes for German biologists

Munich Germany's main university research agency, the DFG, has announced the winners of the 2001 Leibniz Prize, the most important scientific award in Germany.

The seven prizewinners include molecular biologist Eduard Hurt, of the University of Heidelberg, who studies protein structures, and Arthur Konnerth, a neurophysiologist at the University of Munich, who specializes in nerve pathways that regulate mammalian motor systems.

Martin Krönke, an immunologist and cell biologist of the University of Cologne, won for his identification of genes involved in the production of cells that are part of the human immune response. Each winner receives DM3 million (US\$1.4 million), to be spent on their research over the next five years.

Patent regimes should 'take account of poor'

London The British government has proposed an international commission on intellectual property rights to consider how they can be designed "to take greater account of the interests of developing countries and poor people". Topics to be addressed by the commission would include access to genetic resources and "traditional knowledge".

In a white paper (policy document) published this week, the UK Department for International Development says that it is open to "constructive suggestions" on improving the World Trade Organization's agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

Universities target bread mould genome

San Diego Four US universities have won a \$5.25 million grant from the National Science Foundation to sequence the genome of the fungus *Neurospora crassa*, which they say will be a valuable model for human genetics.

Full sequencing of the 10,000 to 15,000 genes of the fungus, a type of bread mould, is to be completed over two years. The project involves scientists at the Whitehead Institute in Massachusetts, the Oregon Graduate Institute of Science and Technology, the University of Kentucky, and the Fungal Genetics Stock Center at Kansas University. Researchers at Oregon University will provide the fungal DNA for sequencing.