



Lab life: the British public could soon be better informed about experiments on animals.

Committee calls for end to secrecy in animal research

London The public should have greater access to information about the use of animals in research, a committee advising the British government says.

A report from the Animal Procedures Committee, an independent group that includes practising researchers and animal-welfare representatives, says that a change in the law is needed to address public concerns about secrecy surrounding the licensing and conduct of animal procedures.

The group called for more publication of negative results to prevent repetition and wider dissemination of details of infringements. The committee also says that a clear and concise summary of procedures should be included on licence applications and that these should be made public. The government says that it broadly accepts the recommendations and will act on them.

♦ <http://www.apc.gov.uk>

Johns Hopkins faces fresh probe over study safety

Washington Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, is set to come under further scrutiny after the US Office for Human Research Protections announced plans to investigate a study that was overseen by the university's researchers.

The research into reducing exposure to lead in the home was carried out by the Kennedy Krieger Institute, a paediatric research centre based in Baltimore, but was supervised by scientists from Johns Hopkins. Two lawsuits brought by families involved in the study are currently under consideration in Maryland courts. They centre on allegations that participants in the experiments were not informed of the health risks of the housing in which they were living.

The announcement of the investigation comes a month after the office suspended all federally funded human studies at the university for five days, after the death in June of a healthy volunteer in an asthma study.

Brazil plans to make generic AIDS drugs

London The Brazilian government has announced plans to start producing a generic version of a drug patented by Swiss pharmaceutical company Roche.

The government claims that the country will save US\$35 million a year by producing its own version of nelfinavir, one of a cocktail of drugs used to treat AIDS. It says that negotiations with Roche over possible delivery of the drug at a reduced price had failed to come to a satisfactory conclusion.

Meanwhile, the South African Treatment Access Campaign (TAC) last week took the country's health minister, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, and nine provincial health ministers to court over their AIDS policies. The campaign demands that nevirapine, which is used to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV, be made freely available to pregnant women infected with the virus.

No charge for Japan's cloned mice

Tokyo The mouse clones that formed the backbone of the international effort to make sense of the mouse genome (see *Nature* 409, 685-690; 2001) are to be made available to researchers free of charge.

Dnaform, a spin-off from Japan's Institute of Physical and Chemical Research (RIKEN), based in Tsukuba, near Tokyo, began supplying the 21,000 clones on request on 27 August. Each clone can be used to study an individual piece of complementary DNA (cDNA) and the gene associated with it.

The announcement was made by Yoshihide Hayashizaki, chief researcher on the mouse cDNA project, at last week's Mouse Molecular Genetics Meeting in Heidelberg, Germany. Previously, only researchers collaborating with RIKEN had been allowed to use the clones.

♦ <http://www.dnaform.co.jp>

Canada chews on transgenic food advice

Montreal Canada needs a centralized information system to advise people about the content of food containing genetically modified ingredients, a report from the Canadian Biotechnology Advisory Committee has concluded.

The committee, an independent body set up to advise the federal government on policy issues, also recommended that a chief safety officer be appointed to oversee the safety of genetically modified food and that federal government make a clear distinction between its roles in promoting and regulating biotechnology.

But the committee's decision to call for voluntary rather than compulsory labelling

has angered food-safety groups, such as the non-profit Council of Canadians. Several such organizations boycotted public consultations relating to the report, claiming that the committee was biased in favour of biotechnology interests.

Solar scheme sails on despite missile crash

Washington A private astronomy group has announced plans to press ahead with a scheme to put a solar sail into orbit, despite the failure of a test launch last month.

The Planetary Society, based in Pasadena, California, says that the first of two solar-sail launches will take place early next year. A suborbital launch on 20 July to test the deployment of two 15-metre triangular sails ended when the sail failed to separate from the converted Soviet intercontinental ballistic missile that was carrying it. The rocket and craft crashed on the Kamchatka Peninsula in eastern Russia.

"We would find it a diversion to build another suborbital test craft," said the society's executive director, Louis Friedman, adding that insurance money from the failed test would help to pay for two new rockets and satellites.

♦ <http://www.planetary.org>

French receive taste of crop vandalism

Paris French activists attacked an experimental trial of genetically modified (GM) crops last week, the first significant act of vandalism against GM crops in France.

Around 150 people uprooted insect- and herbicide-resistant plants belonging to US firm Monsanto at a 1,000-square-metre plot in Beaucaire, southern France. The action followed a threat in July by the Confédération Paysanne, the farmers' union led by José Bové, to destroy all open field trials of GM crops. Bové argues that outdoor trials could allow GM crops to spread beyond the trial sites, but says he does not object to tests in greenhouses.

French research minister Roger-Gérard Schwartzberg described the destruction as "unacceptable".



Letting rip: protesters attack Monsanto's transgenic crops in southern France.