

## Security lapses cost nuclear chief his job

The head of the US nuclear-weapons programme has been sacked.

Linton Brooks, head of the National Nuclear Security Administration since 2002, was fired on 4 January. Energy secretary Samuel Bodman cited security problems at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico as his main reason for dismissing Brooks. The lab has had several security lapses, most recently in October, when a computer drive containing classified information was found in a drug dealer's trailer.

Brooks expressed regret at the decision, but said that it was "based on the principle of accountability that should govern all public service". Taking Brooks's place temporarily will be Thomas D'Agostino, the agency's deputy administrator for defence programmes.

## Capitol Hill anthrax attack 'hit wide area'

The anthrax mailed in 2001 to the office of US senator Tom Daschle affected more people than previously thought, researchers have found.

A team led by biologists at the Naval Medical Research Center in Silver Spring, Maryland, measured immune responses in 124 people after the bioterrorist attack. Of those, 83 were near or in Daschle's office when the anthrax-laced letter was opened, and another 20 were farther away and had presumably not been exposed.

But even people standing outside the building when the spores were released generated immune responses against anthrax, suggesting that they had been exposed, the team found (D. L. Doolan *et al.* *J. Infect. Dis.* 195, 174–184; 2007).

The team also showed that cellular immune responses declined after treatment,



Anthrax mailed to Senator Tom Daschle's office caused widespread immune responses.

## Amazon founder's rocket lifts off

A secretive space tourism project became a little less so this week, after Amazon founder Jeff Bezos and his Blue Origin team released a video of a test launch done last November in Texas.

The grainy footage (see [www.blueorigin.com](http://www.blueorigin.com)) shows the prototype spacecraft (right), powered by hydrogen peroxide, blasting off vertically and returning to Earth the same way up, in true 1950s science-fiction style. The craft ascended about 85 metres — hardly outer space. But Bezos hopes that the design will eventually offer an efficient way to take well-heeled flyers beyond the atmosphere.



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suggesting that the antibiotics were effective against the bacterium — something that has never been shown for a bioterrorist attack.

## Biologist plans hunger strike over tenure snub

A biologist is threatening to go on hunger strike after being denied tenure at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge, alleging that he has been discriminated against because of his race.

James Sherley, a black associate professor who works on stem cells in MIT's biological engineering division, intends to begin his protest on 5 February. He asked for colleagues' support in a letter dated 19 December. "My plea to the MIT faculty is not 'please, help me get tenure at MIT'. It was, and is, 'help me end racism at MIT!'", he says.

MIT has issued a statement saying that it is confident that its procedure for reviewing and granting tenure "was followed with integrity in this case". The decision has already been reviewed independently by senior faculty members.

## ExxonMobil accused over strategy on climate change

The Union of Concerned Scientists has issued a fresh set of charges against ExxonMobil's alleged campaign to spread doubt about global warming.

Drawing on the US oil company's reports and other documents, the group says that between 1998 and 2005, ExxonMobil gave US\$16 million to bodies dedicated in part to amplifying public perceptions of scientific uncertainty over climate change. The organizations include well-known groups such as the Competitive Enterprise Institute and smaller ones such as Frontiers of Freedom.

ExxonMobil says that many of the report's conclusions are "inaccurate".

## Venezuela legislates to boost research spending

Industrial companies in Venezuela will be compelled to invest in research and development, under a law that took effect on 1 January.

Companies that have an annual gross income of more than US\$1.5 million are now required to put 0.5–2% of that income into science, technology or innovation. The amount of spending is determined by the type of company. Hydrocarbon companies are supposed to spend 2%; mining and electricity companies 1%; and all other industries 0.5%, the website SciDev.Net reported last week.

The money can stay in the company's science programmes, or be redirected to universities or other centres.

## Grand Canyon book survives flood of protest

Despite assurances, the US National Park Service has yet to review whether or not it should sell a book that gives a religious explanation for the formation of the Grand Canyon.

In 2003, bookshops run by the park service started to sell the book, *Grand Canyon: A Different View*, which asserts that the Grand Canyon was formed about 6,000 years ago by a flood during Earth's creation. Geologists protested, saying that scientific data contradict the creationist explanation. In late 2003, the park service said that it would review the matter (see *Nature* 427, 186; 2004).

But according to park service spokesman David Barna, the book remains on sale. And *The New York Times* reported on 5 January that the park service never completed its promised review. "It is not our role to tell people what to believe," Barna explained in a written statement.