

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

GM honey concern

The European Court of Justice ruled on 6 September that honey containing trace amounts of pollen from genetically modified (GM) plants can no longer be sold in the European Union without a safety review. The decision could affect imports of honey from countries such as Argentina, which are big producers of GM crops, and increase the already powerful resistance to the cultivation of GM crops in Europe.

Blood donations

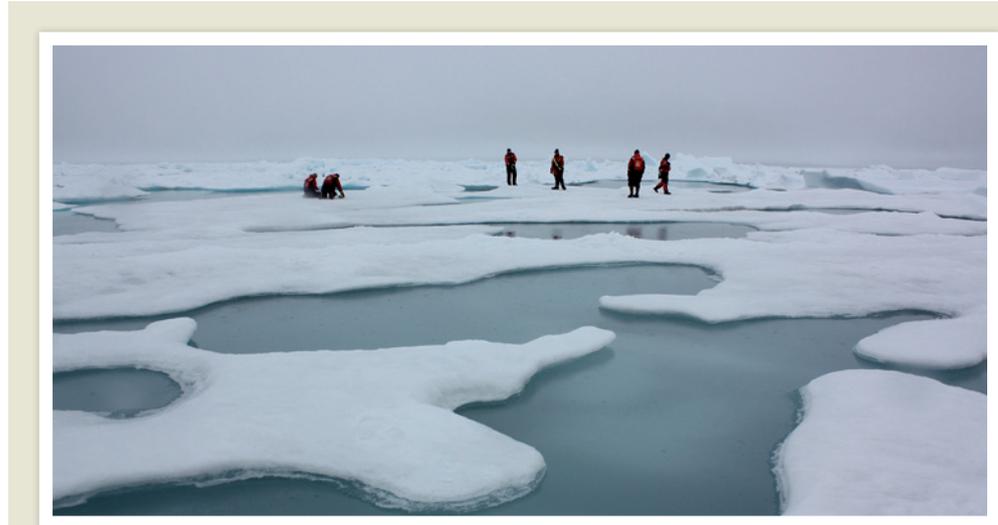
Like Australia, Sweden and Japan, Britain will allow gay men to give blood, as long as their last sexual contact with another man was more than 12 months ago. The Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs said on 8 September that a lifetime ban on blood donations — introduced in the 1980s — could be lifted (from 7 November) without increasing the risk of infections such as HIV being transmitted. The United States and Canada still prohibit gay men from giving blood.

Ozone network cut

As part of cuts due to budget constraints, Canada's environment agency has decided to shut down a network of stations that monitor ozone levels in the Arctic. Environment Canada's ozone and radiation research group will also be substantially reduced, and the agency has said that it will no longer host a long-running archive of ozone data. See page 257 for more.

US patent reform

US inventors should find it easier to get and defend patents following the long-awaited passing of reforms



K. HANSEN/NASA

Arctic sea ice drops to record low

The extent of sea ice in the Arctic dropped to a new record minimum last week, according to researchers at the University of Bremen in Germany, who used high-resolution microwave data from a sensor on board NASA's Aqua satellite. At 4.24 million square kilometres, sea-ice cover on 8 September was 27,000 square kilometres smaller than

the previous record low, observed in 2007. Melting on the surface of the ice (pictured, during a NASA ICESCAPE research mission in July) has already ended, but late-season ice loss may continue, say scientists with the US National Snow and Ice Data Center, in Boulder, Colorado, as warm water continues to melt the ice from below.

to the patent system. The America Invents Act — passed by the Senate on 8 September, after clearing the House of Representatives in June (see *Nature* 472, 149; 2011) — will switch the US system from one where considerable resources are spent establishing priority for inventions, to a system in which the patent is granted to whoever files an application first. See page 249 for more.

Illegal fishing

The United States and Europe have pledged greater cooperation in fighting illegal fishing, which has pushed many species into decline. Jane Lubchenco, head of the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Maria Damanaki, the European Union fisheries commissioner, made the

announcement last week, but gave few details beyond references to improving monitoring and enforcement.

RESEARCH

Exoplanet trove

European astronomers announced on 12 September the discovery of more than 50 exoplanets, including one that sits in the 'habitable zone': the distance at which it orbits its star means that the planet could harbour liquid water. The discoveries were made with the High Accuracy Radial Velocity Planet Searcher (HARPS) on a telescope at La Silla Observatory in Chile, run by the European Southern Observatory. They are the latest salvo in the competition between ground-based telescope teams (such as

HARPS) and the NASA space telescope, Kepler. See go.nature.com/l9cptom for more.

Cancer lawsuits

Eight patients with cancer who were enrolled in clinical trials based on faulty research are suing the scientists involved and their institution, Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. The lawsuit, filed on 7 September, relates to trials based on the work of cancer geneticist Anil Potti, who claimed to have found links between patients' gene-expression profiles and their response to chemotherapy drugs. After other scientists raised questions about the analysis, Potti resigned and five papers were retracted; the trials are now suspended (see *Nature* 469, 139–140; 2011). But the plaintiffs allege that researchers

TEPCO and officials at Duke University pushed forward with the trials, despite knowing that the research was flawed.

Mapping the Moon

Two spacecraft that will fly in tandem around the Moon to precisely map its gravitational field, and therefore the composition of its interior, were launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida, on 10 September. NASA's Gravity Recovery and Interior Laboratory (GRAIL) mission will take a circuitous 3.5-month journey to lunar orbit and will not start to collect data until early March 2012. For more on the mission, see *Nature* 477, 16–17 (2011).

Cancer centre cut

As part of a major shake-up, the Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research (LICR) is closing its colorectal-cancer centre in Parkville, Australia. Scientists there say that they are disappointed and bewildered by the decision. The LICR, a non-profit organization, spends more than US\$100 million each year at ten centres around the world and employs more than 700 staff, focusing on translating basic research into novel cancer therapies. But it wants to concentrate research at two or three large hubs and close down small branches. See go.nature.com/fy8xky for more.



EVENTS

Fukushima cover

Six months after the meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan, workers have completed a metal frame over the damaged unit 1 reactor (pictured), ready to hold a cover to shield it from the wind and rain and lessen the chance of radioactivity spreading. Workers continue to pour water into the reactor core, which is currently at 85–90 °C. Meanwhile, Japan's trade and industry minister, Yoshio Hachiro, resigned just 9 days into his post after local media reported that he had referred to an exclusion zone near the plant as a “town of death”, and joked about radiation at a press conference.

Nuclear explosion

One worker was killed and four injured by a furnace explosion at a facility for incinerating low-level nuclear waste near Codolet, southern

France, on 12 September. The plant, known as CENTRACO, is administered by a subsidiary of the French energy company EDF. A spokeswoman said that no radioactivity had been released beyond the site. See go.nature.com/ixhoef for more.

PEOPLE

NASA spy jailed

A former NASA scientist has been sentenced to 13 years in prison after admitting that he tried to sell classified information to Israel. Stewart Nozette was a distinguished expert on defence and space technology, and principal investigator for the radar instrument on NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter. He worked for a series of US government agencies in the 1980s and 1990s. He was arrested in October 2009 after an FBI sting operation, and made a plea deal with prosecutors on 7 September. See go.nature.com/dra37v for more.

Suspected fraud

Tilburg University in the Netherlands announced on 7 September that it had suspended Diederik Stapel, a prominent Dutch psychology professor, because he had used ‘fictitious’ data in his research. Stapel, 45, was director of the Tilburg Institute for

COMING UP

19–20 SEPTEMBER

In New York, the United Nations holds a major summit on tackling non-communicable diseases such as heart attack and cancer. See also page 260. go.nature.com/oc9r7t

19–21 SEPTEMBER

At Google's headquarters in Mountain View, California, the US National Academy of Sciences hosts a meeting on the ‘frontiers of engineering’, including sessions on neuroprosthetics and sustainable buildings. go.nature.com/qfpz1h

Behavioral Economics Research, and his work explored power, stereotyping and other social behaviours. A committee chaired by a former president of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences will scrutinize Stapel's work at Tilburg, where he joined the faculty in 2006, and at his previous institution the University of Groningen, and publish its findings by the end of October.

Lasker award

The US\$250,000 Basic Medical Research Award — whose winners often go on to receive a Nobel prize — was this year awarded to two protein biochemists: Franz-Ulrich Hartl of the Max Planck Institute for Biochemistry in Munich, Germany, and Arthur Horwich of Yale University School of Medicine in New Haven, Connecticut. The duo helped to establish how proteins called chaperonins assist other proteins in folding into complicated three-dimensional shapes.

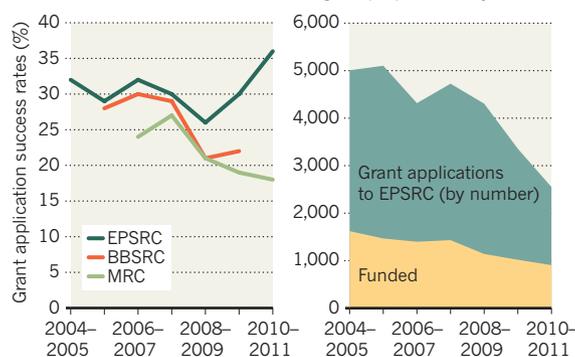
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TREND WATCH

Britain's Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council seems to be reaping the benefits of its sometimes controversial efforts to reduce the number of grant applications it receives (see *Nature* 464, 474–475; 2010). In 2010–11, the agency funded 912 of 2,568 applications: a smaller number than in previous years, but at 36% a much greater success rate (see charts). By contrast, success rates at other UK research funding agencies are still falling. See go.nature.com/tlmcij for more.

SUCCESSING IN BRITAIN

By cutting applications, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council funded more than one in three grant proposals last year.



EPSRC: Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council; BBSRC: Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; MRC: Medical Research Council.