

ENVIRONMENT

Charting Chemicals

from a Correspondent

AN information network on chemical substances and their effects on the environment would be valuable, according to the Royal Society's British National Committee for Problems of the Environment. This was the outcome of a meeting held recently in London under the auspices of the committee and attended by 200 participants, which included representatives from the European Economic Commission, the OECD, and the United Nations Environment Programme.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the feasibility and usefulness of collecting into a centralized network existing data on known chemicals in order to predict any possible future adverse effect from chemicals with broadly similar properties. In the wider context these data could provide a guide to environmental management policies.

The meeting also called for a reconciliation of the voluntary methods used in Britain for controlling substances introduced into the environment with the legally enforced methods used by most other countries within the EEC.

It was pointed out at the meeting that there was very little known about ecological toxicity compared with the great deal of information available on human toxicology. A call was also made for the participants at the meeting to provide specimen input on relevant environmental sources so that a demonstration project could be mounted in time for the first session of the governing council of the United Nations Environment Programme which is to be held next month.

The conclusions of the meeting, which was organized by Sir James Cook and Sir Frederick Warner, will be discussed by the British National Committee with a view to the committee formulating recommendations which might be put to the government at some time in the future.

SPACE

Belgians Protest

THE European Launcher Development Organization may yet refuse to die quietly. When the French and Germans announced at ELDO's last council meeting on April 27 that they were withdrawing financial support from the Europa II launcher project as of May 1, the chief reaction was silence. Even the British press, which might have been expected to announce that Britain had been right to pull out of the organization in 1968, largely ignored the event. It looked as though the organization could be killed far more easily than many had thought possible.

But Belgium, which only found out about the Franco-German decision in the council chamber, has decided, after thinking about it for a fortnight, to register its protest, and the staff of ELDO has issued a statement explaining exactly what it thinks of the organization's history.

In a statement issued last week, Mr Charles Hanin, the Belgian Science Policy Minister, and chairman of the European Space Conference announced that he intended to convene a meeting of the conference shortly, and made it clear that he is far from happy with the attitude of the French and German governments. Belgium too had a substantial interest in Europa II, Mr Hanin said, but its government was never consulted. It is clear that when the conference does meet—probably in early July—a few explanations are going to be needed.

The ELDO staff in its statement condemns the attitude of the member states, and points out that the Europa project was killed before the organization's new structure—devised after the failure of F11 in November 1971—had had a chance. The staff "refuses to be associated with the responsibility for the waste of not completing a programme of such heavy capital investment, of which very little use can be made even if the L3S programme is carried out.

"It is clear that the failure of these programmes is primarily due to the political incapacity of the member states to define a common purpose and work together in a genuinely cooperative spirit," the staff says. The next launch had been scheduled for October 1, 1973, and the ELDO staff "protests strongly at the political failure of the member states being presented to public opinion as a technical failure discrediting their professional ability".

But while the ELDO staff and the Belgium government may be justifiably angry at the speed with which they were presented with a *fait accompli*, the Belgians are still eager to continue work on L3S, the launcher proposed by France. Mr Hanin, however, made it clear that he would be happier if the launcher is managed by a European organization rather than by France.

ELDO, however, is most unlikely to manage the programme, even though the organization as such still exists, and may continue to do so until the new space agency comes into existence (see page 126). The Belgians will propose, however, that ELDO should organize the collection of the European money that will be put into the L3S programme if it goes ahead. But it has been suggested that the launcher might even be managed by the European Space Research Organization as a special project in the same way that ESRO manages the Spacelab programme.

SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL

New Chairman

PROFESSOR S. F. EDWARDS was named last week to succeed Sir Brian Flowers as chairman of the Science Research Council in October. Professor Edwards, who is 45, is currently John Humphrey Plummer Professor of Physics at the University of Cambridge.

Professor Edwards will take full time leave of absence from Cambridge during his tenure as chairman of the SRC, which, in the first instance, will be for four years. He has also taken up an existing vacancy on the council until the time he becomes chairman.



Professor S. F. Edwards

Professor Edwards was educated at Bishop Gore Grammar School, Swansea, Gonville and Caius College, University of Cambridge, and Harvard. He also spent a year at the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton in 1952 before taking up a post at the University of Birmingham. He moved to Manchester in 1958 and became professor of theoretical physics there in 1963. He has been a Fellow of the Royal Society since 1966 and a vice-president of the Institute of Physics since 1970. He has served the SRC in various capacities since 1968.

The retiring chairman and the new chairman of the council have had remarkably similar careers. Both were educated at Bishop Gore Grammar School in Swansea and at Gonville and Caius College at Cambridge. Both are theoretical physicists but with quite different interests — Sir Brian is a nuclear physicist whereas Professor Edwards' chief interests lie in chemical physics. Both have also held chairs at the University of Manchester and been on the staff of the University of Birmingham.