

IN BRIEF

NRPB evidence published

The UK National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB), which advises the government on radiation hazards, has urged a fresh appraisal of Britain's approach to nuclear waste management. The board's evidence to the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP), disclosed last week, adds credence to the view that the RCEP's forthcoming report on radiological safety in Britain will itself criticise the relatively disappointing level of UK research into the safe disposal of long-lived radioactive nuclides arising from the nuclear power programme.

The NRPB evidence nonetheless questions recent attacks on international exposure limits for plutonium; and it endorses calls for individually established standards for radioactive discharge from nuclear installations, rather than blanket legislation.

AGR running smoothly

Barring unforeseen setbacks the commercial output of Britain's first Advanced Gas Cooled Reactor (AGR) nuclear power station, Hinkley Point B in Somerset, will have doubled to 1,000 MW by the coming winter. The second of Hinkley B's twin 660 MW reactors, now undergoing final engineering tests, is expected to come on-line in October, closely on schedule. The first has been performing smoothly at around 500 MW since July, following its switch on eight months ago—outstanding corrosion problems have restricted output to about 80% of the design level. Hinkley B is already producing electricity as cheaply as first generation, magnox nuclear installations, and could eventually become more competitive.

Though the Central Electricity Generating Board last week expressed renewed confidence in the AGR, which it regards as among the safest and 'cleanest' of existing nuclear reactor

types, export prospects remain bleak because of its comparatively high capital cost and unproven commercial record.

Uranium fix?

Officials from California's State Energy Commission and Public Utilities Commission have in the past few weeks given the US Department of Justice and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee copies of documents obtained by the Australian Friends of the Earth (and published in the Australian press) apparently revealing the existence since 1971 of an international cartel to fix the price of free world uranium.

The documents, apparently obtained from the files of Mary Kathleen Uranium of Australia, are said to contain references to a meeting in Johannesburg in January 1974 attended by representatives from Australia, South Africa, Canada, France and the London-based Rio Tinto Zinc.

No official comment on the matter was available last week from the Justice Department in Washington, which in July served subpoenas on US and Canadian companies in connection with its investigations of a price ring, or from the Uranium Institute in London, which the documents reportedly suggest might have been intended as the successor to the Uranium Marketing Research Organisation, the name purportedly used by members of the "club" to describe their group.

Solar energy gathering

The planning and coordination of the international effort to develop solar energy was one of the subjects which about 150 scientists from more than 50 countries discussed last week when the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and UNESCO held a symposium in Geneva. The symposium, a sequel to one held in 1973 at UNESCO headquarters, also discussed problems, both technical and educational, asso-

ciated with the conversion of solar radiation.

Nuclear exports overseer

Following the first meeting of the new French Government, the Elysee Palace last week announced the formation of a high-level government council to oversee France's participation in the growing international trade in nuclear technology. It will "define and co-ordinate sales of nuclear techniques and products".

President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing will head the new committee, which will also include the new Prime Minister, M Raymond Barre, the Foreign, Defence, Finance, Industry and Foreign Trade ministers, and the president of the French Atomic Energy Commission (CEA).

The creation of the new body comes after the call from non-aligned states at their recent conference in Colombo for an oil embargo against France. It also follows the row between France and the US over the sale of a reprocessing plant to Pakistan and the controversy over France's deal involving nuclear plants for South Africa.

Dr Henry Kissinger is meanwhile due to see President Giscard d'Estaing in Paris this week for talks which are expected to include discussions on French nuclear policy.

Biblis to restart

The 1,200 MW Biblis nuclear power station near Essen, West Germany, which was shut down in April after a routine check revealed cracks in the feed-water container, was expected to be back in operation this week, according to a spokesman for the operating utility RWE. News of the fault first emerged in early July, when RWE and Kraftwerk Union, which built the plant, disclosed the cause of the delay. Kraftwerk Union handed the twin pressurised water reactors over in February last year.

Competition 9 Even a common word like electricity was new once. For a prize of £10 we want to hear ideas and terse definitions for new words which will describe some existing or future scientific concept or phenomenon. An example might be 'polyfood'—a food made from, or containing, polyunsaturated fats. The closing date for entries is October 19.

Competition 8 asked for a one-sentence slogan for a laboratory,



business or university. The high quality of the entry forced a sharing of the £10 prize between Simon Bright of Hertfordshire, UK, whose slogan

for British Thornton (or any other manufacturer of slide rules) was "Slide Rules OK", and Alan Mellors and David Piggins of the University of Guelph, Canada, who for the Porton Down Bacteriological Research Establishment offered the slogan "Our enthusiasm is infectious". F. A. Smith of the University of Adelaide, Australia, receives honorable mention with his suggestion for a Forestry Department: "We saw the trees for the wood".