

news in brief

Pochin calls for improvements in safety at Aldermaston: Substantial improvements in safety measures are urgently needed at the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, Aldermaston, according to Sir Edward Pochin in his recent report on safety at AWRE. Workers there should be better protected from inhaling radioactive dust, the report says.

Pochin's inquiry, leading to the recent report, was set up following events last August when three women from the special laundry at AWRE were found to have plutonium in their lungs in excess of the level recommended by the International Commission on Radiological Protection.

In the report, Sir Edward says that the general level of health protection in the plutonium processing buildings is "of borderline adequacy", even though the industrial safety record is excellent.

Cutbacks in the number of safety staff and inadequate training had caused a serious decline in monitoring of radioactivity, he says, and, consequently, workers were being exposed to potentially dangerous levels of radioactivity. Monitoring standards had fallen behind those in other establishments in the UK and the US, although an increase in the number of personal air samplers, and a body counter to estimate plutonium in the lung, now being built, would improve matters.

Sir Edward recommends that in the long term major improvements should be made to buildings where solid and liquid waste are reprocessed; the containment of alpha-emitting radionuclides is very difficult with the present safety measures, he says.

AWRE and the National Radiological Protection Board have set up a joint committee to review the radiation exposures of individual workers, and inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive are to visit the establishment.

Supreme court rejects Podrabinek's appeal: Aleksandr Podrabinek (pictured right), the Moscow paramedic sentenced last August to five years internal exile last week had his appeal rejected by the Supreme Court of the Russian SFSR. The court stated that the charges of anti-Soviet slander had been upheld.

Mr Podrabinek, an active member of the illicit "Working Commission for the Investigation of the Use of Psychiatry for Political Purposes" is the author of a 265-page *samizdat* dossier on Soviet abuses of psychiatry to crush dissent.

Mr Podrabinek was not permitted to attend the appeal hearing. Nor was his chosen defence counsel, the London lawyer Louis Blom-Cooper. According to Mr Blom-Cooper Podrabinek's original trial involved the violation of no less than 78 provisions of Soviet legal procedure. Dissident sources in Moscow suggest the same pattern was followed at the appeal hearing—no defence witnesses were called nor was Podrabinek's own statement read to the presiding judges. (Photo courtesy of Keston College.)



belongs to the researcher provided that he or she was not employed specifically to invent.

After the 1977 Patents Act, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals issued a report on the ownership of patents which tentatively suggested that the individual should hold patent rights. However, the AUT says that in the past most compensation for inventions has gone to the universities. The AUT, therefore, wanted "to seek an independent view", said Mr John Akker, its deputy general secretary.

The AUT hopes soon to begin talks with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to lay down guidelines on the ownership of patent rights which could be applied to all British universities.

NASA is to investigate Martian "White Rock"; This strange, white, horseshoe crab-shaped feature found inside a Martian crater (see photo) is to be studied by scientists working with the NASA Viking mission. The feature, nicknamed 'white rock', is the only one of its kind on Mars. Its composition is unknown, but it is unlikely to be either ice or snow because it lies near the equator.

The 'white rock' is about 18 km long and 14 km wide, and is at the bottom of a crater located at 8° South, 335° West.



Women scientists still lag in US: Despite significant increases in the proportion of women science graduates emerging from US colleges and universities, their salaries are still lower than those of men with comparable training and experience at every age, every degree level, in every field and with every type of employer (except for chemistry BAs employed by industry), according to figures released last week by the US Scientific Manpower Commission.

The commission says that detailed statistical analysis of the participation of women in the professional labour force indicate that women have roughly doubled their proportion of earned degrees in the sciences since 1970, and quadrupled their share of engineering bachelor's degrees. However, unemployment rates for professionally trained women continue to be two to five times higher than for men in the same field with the same level of training, and the gap increases at higher levels.

In the federal government, women still lag well behind their male counterparts in grade level (and hence salary). Thus among the federal government's 1,700 microbiologists, the average salary is \$23,260 for men and \$18,550 for women.

New parliamentary group for alternative energy: The UK Parliamentary Liaison Group for Alternative Energy Strategies called its first public meeting last week at the House of Commons. Chaired by Frank Hooley, MP, and supported by many environmental groups, the Group called Sam Berman, Director of the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratories, Peter Chapman, Director of the Open University Energy Group, and Gerald Leach, of the International Institute for Environment and Development, to speak. The next meeting is on 29 January with Tony Benn, Secretary of State for Energy.

Patent rights for university researchers: In an attempt to clear up the issue of whether patent rights for inventions made by researchers in British universities should be held by the researcher or the university, the Association of University Teachers (AUT) has sought the opinion of a leading firm of solicitors, which has said that the invention