

NEWS IN BRIEF

Aid recommended for nuclear test victims

NUCLEAR weapons testing probably resulted in "a small number of cases of death or disease" among those living downwind of the test sites in Nevada during the 1950s and early 1960s, for which the government should be prepared to take responsibility, according to press reports of an investigation carried out by a White House study group.

A local paper in Nevada, the *Desert News*, said that the study group's 57-page report, currently under "active consideration" according to White House officials, recommends that legislation should be drafted to compensate those who may have developed cancer as a result of the testing.

However the group is said to oppose legislation proposed by Senators Edward Kennedy and Orrin Hatch conceding liability for radiogenic cancers among residents of the fall-out areas during the period of the tests with courts directed to set the damages payable. The group argues that a more restrictive proposal should be worked out.

Over 950 current and former residents of states surrounding the testing region have already filed over \$2 billion in claims against the government for injuries which, they claim, are directly related to the testing.

Inflexibility of Delany Clause criticised

DR DONALD Kennedy, until recently commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration and currently provost of the University of Stanford, last week criticised the Delaney amendment — which forbids the use of any chemicals in food shown to have caused cancer in laboratory animals — as being too inflexible and in need of revision.

Dr Kennedy said that the clause in the FDA's authorising legislation codifies the hypothesis that there is no threshold

concentration below which a chemical does not cause cancer. And although this hypothesis "probably holds most of the time", Dr Kennedy said that he was "as certain as I can be of any scientific prediction that some day, very soon, some compound will be demonstrated to have a threshold level for cancer causation."

The Delaney clause was a good version of how society should deal with such risks, he said, but was suffering because of its inflexibility, leaving no room even for a convincing scientific demonstration that there is a safe level for some cancer-causing substance.

"Any law that purports to deal with science ought to leave room for scientific progress," said Dr Kennedy. "For that reason I favour altering the Delaney clause and similar provisions to reflect presumption rather than certainty — a presumption of risk that could be rebutted by a scientific showing that a certain level is indeed safe, or that the use of a particular kind of experiment actually overstated the risks."

Cracks discovered in reactor turbine blades

CRACKS have been discovered in the turbine blades of ten nuclear reactors constructed by the Westinghouse Corporation. Company officials point out that, since the turbines operate totally outside the nuclear plant, they are not considered to present a major source of safety concern at present.

Critics, however, claim that if a turbine disintegrated as a result of the cracking, fragments of steel blades could seriously damage the reactor vessel or a safety system. The Union of Concerned Scientists has asked that plants where serious cracks have been found should be shut down immediately for inspection.

The US Nuclear Regulatory Commission has identified cracks in the turbines of ten reactors, and has drawn up a list of 19 reactors that should be inspected for cracking during the next scheduled shutdowns. The commission is currently studying whether an earlier shutdown is warranted for any of the reactors.

ESA countries approve Spacelab cost overruns

THE member states of the European Space Agency voted unanimously last week to reaffirm their commitment to complete the Spacelab programme in spite of cost overruns. Under the initial Spacelab agreement, member states retained the right to withdraw from the programme if cost overruns exceeded 20%. The Spacelab programme board last week approved a further funding up to a 40% over-run after which another vote can be

taken. Only Italy decided to reduce its contribution (from 18% to 1%) and the remaining ten states have assumed the increased cost. The 1980 Spacelab budget now amounts to \$304 million.

In the meantime UK space scientists have raised objections to the Science Research Council's rejection of Spacelab experiments in the last round of budget applications. "They are reluctant to recognise that space experiments are costly. If this keeps up the UK will lose its expertise in building space hardware," said one of them. An SRC official said that the SRC judged every experiment on a cost effective basis — "it's a question of value for money".

Violence, barricades and arrests at Plogoff

MILITANT demonstrators barricaded all roads into Plogoff recently — the Brittany town in cap Sizun where a complex of four nuclear reactors is to be sited — after Mme Amelie Kerloc'h, deputy mayor of Plogoff had asked the townspeople "to make the commune an island inaccessible to the police". The barricades followed a week of confrontation with a 600-strong police force in which police bombarded demonstrators with teargas grenades thrown from helicopters and the demonstrators countered with Molotov cocktails and stones against massed police formations. An explosive charge damaged the Loc'h bridge and 14 demonstrators, all young workers from the vicinity, were arrested. A delegation of mayors and elected officials from the entire cap Sizun region has demanded the withdrawal of the police as a first step to defuse the situation.

US publishes science magazine in China

THE first issue of a new Chinese language science and technology monthly, *Science and Technology Review*, was launched last month in Beijing. Published by the Education and Science Society in the US, the magazine is edited by US scientists and overseas Chinese scholars including C.N. Yang, Professor of Physics at Stony Brook and winner of the 1956 Nobel Prize in physics. 100,000 copies of the first issue are being sold in 29 municipalities, provinces and autonomous regions. The 104-page first issue includes articles on comparative economic systems — Japan, Yugoslavia and the USSR — and an interview with Sheldon Weinberg and Steven Glashow winners of this year's Nobel prize in physics. According to Xinhua, the Chinese news agency, the magazine, which is the first foreign publication to be given wide circulation in China, is to be given special attention by "the decision-makers and administrators of the state".

