

scheduled to be launched in 1982. Development of the instrument called a "thematic mapper", and intended to provide direct information on crop differentiation, is so much delayed that Landsat D may have to be launched without it.

The delays in both technical plans and administrative arrangements have created inevitable frustrations. Those who have already experienced the benefits of remote sensing technology are keen to exploit it as rapidly as possible, and are already hinting that they may look to other countries — such as France and Japan — as an alternative source of remote sensing services. Moreover, some members of Congress claim that the delays reflect a general lack of imagination in the White House about the US space effort.

NOAA is at present working out the details of the transition plan in preparation for its submission as part of the 1982 budget request early next year. It seems more likely to include only limited private involvement — perhaps restricted to processing and marketing the data produced by federally operated satellites.

David Dickson

### Lords committee

## Dumping ahead

The House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology embarked on its summer break last week with the promise of a new inquiry in October into the disposal of hazardous waste. The inquiry will be the committee's second quick investigation — the report of the first, on electric vehicles, is due to be published at the beginning of September. A longer investigation of forestry in the United Kingdom will continue until the end of the year.

The suggestion of an inquiry into hazardous waste disposal came from Basildon District Council in Essex, where a large proportion of Britain's toxic industrial waste is dumped. When the House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment declined to take the matter up because of other commitments, the Lords committee stepped in, believing the topic to fit well into its remit of investigating areas of science and technology of public concern.

The worry of Basildon District and Essex County Councils is that there is no coherent national policy for hazardous waste disposal, largely because the relevant section of Part II of the 1974 Control of Pollution Act has never been implemented. The councils also believe that Essex has become a main centre for hazardous waste disposal by historical accident rather than for good practical reasons.

The government has laid down guidelines for dealing with the disposal of hazardous waste but no regulations as to who should be responsible for arranging disposal. The 1974 Act says that local authorities should take that responsibility and should inform



Dumping at Pitsea

the Secretary of State for the Environment of the arrangements they have made. The Act empowers the Department of the Environment to bring these and other provisions (affecting water quality, for example) into force when it chooses. So far it has chosen not to do so, allegedly on the grounds of cost. Redland Purle, Britain's largest waste disposal company, owns the country's largest dump at Pitsea in Essex. The council has power to monitor the sites and has taken measures to restrict the quantities dumped, but it would take other local authorities to take some of the load.

The Lords committee will no doubt be looking at the institutional arrangements for coping with hazardous waste. It also intends to investigate the basis for some of the technical arrangements, for example the criteria used for choosing suitable sites and deciding what can be dumped where. The Select Committee hopes the inquiry can come to grips with new methods of disposal and suggest how more use could be quickly made of them.

Judy Redfearn

### Energy alternatives

## German plans

A West German commission on "future nuclear energy politics", set up two years ago by the Bundestag to resolve the nuclear question, has reached its eagerly awaited conclusions. They are equivocal.

West Germany should shelve a final "decision" on nuclear power until 1990, says the commission. But in the meantime the country should build as many reactors as it needs, provided it makes due effort on the development of coal, conservation and renewable sources.

The all-party parliamentary commission, consisting of seven members of the Bundestag and eight technical experts from industry, environmental groups and the trades unions, considers that it will be impossible to judge — for ten years — whether nuclear energy should be expanded in Germany. The growth rate of electricity consumption, the effectiveness of conservation measures and the impact of renewable energy are too uncertain to make commitments to any particular source.

The commission does however spell out its demands for immediate and increased government powers to enforce energy conservation — the abolition of mileage rates for business cars, an energy tax, more bicycle paths and tighter controls on insulation standards in new homes and factories. The commission also asks for an "energy service" to provide, free of charge, an infrared survey of buildings to show where the heat leaks out. These and other measures have been described by the Christian Democratic Union, the main opposition party, as introducing "a totalitarian energy conservation state".

Elsewhere, the recommendations have been seen as vague and offering all things to all men — especially with the recommendation that reactors should be built if energy demand requires them. The major nuclear construction company in Germany, Kraftwerk-Union, has argued that it will be running out of work in 1983 — it has lost its contract for four reactors in Iran, and there is doubt as to whether Brazil will take up its full option for eight. Thus some suggest that a construction programme of one or two reactors a year over the next decade, a programme similar in its scale to the British, is quite consistent with the commission's view.

At the same time, the report has been interpreted by environmentalists as recommending a further delay in the country's nuclear development. (Germany now has five power reactors above 500 MW electric; in total 15 reactors produce about 9 GW.) It is not surprising that the commission has been represented in the German press as a man wearing two badges, one saying "nuclear no thanks" and the other "nuclear power — yes please".

The forthcoming October general