studied in the state of California. This revealed, among other things, considerable differences in the rate at which IBCs accepted or rejected proposals for experiments in particular containment conditions, raising questions about the consistency with which research workers are interpreting the guidelines.

The report was prepared by Dr Dianna Dutton of Stanford University School of Medicine, under a grant from the National Science Foundation. She pointed out that IBCs established by private companies in particular had a high acceptance rate of proposals, and also claimed that the fact that none of the IBCs contacted publicized their regular meetings, even though attendance was unrestricted, reflected an apparent reluctance to involve the public in IBC decision-making.

A nationwide study of IBCs is now being planned by NIH, and will be discussed at a meeting of IBC chairmen in November. In the light of this proposed review, and the result of the Stanford study, RAC agreed that consideration of the elimination of pre-review of experiments should be deferred "until the frequency of principal investigator error in selecting containment levels is determined".

In another step designed to lessen the burden of regulation — this time primarily on the private sector — the committee agreed that its review of proposals for large-scale experiments should be focused chiefly on aspects of biological safety.

This decision was the culmination of a lengthy debate over how far NIH should go in regulating recombinant DNA research in the private sector. As there is no legislation, private companies are at present unregulated, although all companies involved have agreed to observe the NIH guidelines voluntarily.

A major stumbling block to this has been disagreement over procedures for evaluating experiments involving more than 10 litres of culture, at present requiring special permission from the director of NIH regardless of the genetic material being used. Some committee members have argued that RAC lacks the technical expertise to evaluate the safety of large-scale fermentation techniques, others that regulation in this area is the responsibility of the Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

Dr Eula Bingham, however, the head of OSHA, has now written to NIH saying that although her agency can act on complaints from workers or on suspicion of a potential hazard, it lacks the statutory powers to require the certification of facilities where no hazard is suspected.

Committee member Dr Sheldon Krimsky of Tufts University proposed that, in the light of OSHA's reply, a subcommittee of RAC should be set up with representatives of other federal agencies to comment on proposed containment procedures for large-scale experiments. He pointed out that although the pre-review of industrial technology might be a radical departure for regulatory agencies in general, it was within the spirit of the scientific and public concern which had originally led to the development of NIH guidelines.

Other committee members, however, were not convinced. Having earlier passed a motion agreeing to procedures for evaluating the biological classification of proposed large-scale experiments — and therefore the level of physical containment that would be required — they amended Dr Krimsky's proposal suggesting a new subcommittee primarily to advise on the proper procedures and design of such operations. The proposed subcommittee would review the effectiveness of local IBCs, including industrial IBCs, but it would not have to approve specific containment procedures for particular experiments; and its creation has still to be approved by the director of NIH.

David Dickson

Biotechnology

UK company gells

Britain's new biotechnology company, Celltech, is beginning to take shape. Sir Michael Stoker, foreign secretary of the Royal Society and former director of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, has been appointed chairman of the board of directors and it is thought that Norman Carey of G. D. Searle Limited is in line for the scientific directorship. Most of the other members of the board have also been appointed. Offers of senior posts have been made, although it is not yet clear how many of them will be taken up. A full statement is promised later in the month.

Since the National Enterprise Board's announcement in July (*Nature*, 24 July, page 321) that it was to provide 40–50 per cent of the initial £12 million to set up the company, the managing director, Mr G. Fairtlough, has been looking for a site for administrative offices and a laboratory as well as appointing his board and senior posts. The most likely site, as was rumoured earlier, is Cambridge, although other possible sites are also being considered. The plan now is to buy existing offices and laboratories near to each other, which could be adapted easily to the company's needs.

The timing of the start of the company's operations will depend to a large extent on the suitability of the laboratories it acquires, but Mr Fairtlough is hopeful that operations could begin early next year. An older building needing extensive alterations would obviously delay the start.

As soon as the senior post have been filled, Fairtlough plans to start looking for candidates for other posts. The company hopes to build up a staff of 75–100 over the next two years. Initial products will be for medical diagnosis, but the company hopes to expand into other fields later and to cooperate with larger pharmaceutical companies on production of items beyond its scope.

Judy Redfearn

Going and coming

Sir William Henderson, chairman of the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Group (GMAG), responsible for the administration of the UK guidelines on recombinant DNA, will be giving up as chairman at, or soon after, the end of 1980. His original appointment, at the end of 1978, was for a term of two years, but it is understood that he is prepared to stay on for a month or so if his successor cannot take over at the beginning of the year.

In the past few months, there has been some confusion among GMAG members about the future chairmanship of the committee, which has apparently not yet been decided.

GMAG is also in the throes of a debate about its own future. At its next meeting, GMAG will debate a proposal by one of its members that the group should recommend its own demise. The proposal is likely to be resisted by the government departments and agencies concerned, at least until the Dangerous Pathogens Advisory Group (in limbo since the smallpox accident at the University of Birmingham two years ago) is reconstituted.

It has also become known in the past week that the search committee of the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) has nominated as the next director-general of EMBO Dr L. Philipson of the Department of Microbiology of the Biomedium Centre at Uppsala. If appointed by the EMBO council, Dr Philipson will succeed Sir John Kendrew, whose term of office ends next year.

French universities

Trouble behind

Paris

French universities are still recovering from a series of attacks and retreats by the government which have left the universities strictly on the defensive.

In July, the minister for the universities, Mme Saunier-Seïté, vetoed the granting by the universities of the long-standing "engineer PhD", the Docteur-Ingénieur, and cancelled 200 first degree (deuxième cycle) and 600 postgraduate (troisième cycle) courses which were due for reapproval by her ministry.

Last month, the Prime Minister, M. Raymond Barre, intervened in the resulting row, but his action was more cosmetic than real. He restored the freedom to create Docteur-Ingénieurs at 25 of France's 78 universities, and approved a further 22

0028-0836/80/400381-02$01.00