

The one potential casualty, the National Oceanic Satellite System (NOSS) — the proposed successor to the SEASAT satellite — will receive an extra \$6.4 million through the research budget of the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). NOAA has also received an additional \$1 million for manned undersea facilities, but had \$2 million for acid rain research cut from its budget.

In biomedical research, Congress has rejected proposals from both the House and the Senate for greater supervision of NIH. A bill continuing authorization for the National Cancer Institute and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute was passed on 5 December without either the provision for a Presidential Commission on biomedical research priorities, proposed by Senator Edward Kennedy, or controversial new authorizing legislation for the remaining nine research institutes which had been proposed by Representative Henry Waxman.

Cuts in the Defense Department's proposed research programme could set back the growth of ties between the military and universities that have been developing over the past four years, according to Pentagon officials, who warned that in particular proposed new programmes for the Department of the Army may have to be cut back.

Nor will the Defense Department be receiving the hoped-for funds to construct a new production facility for binary chemical weapons. This was deleted by members of the Senate from next year's appropriations bill, on the grounds that if the United States is to resume chemical weapons production, this should be a presidential not a congressional decision.

David Dickson

## Nuclear safety

### European hazards

Brussels

European nuclear power stations are not as vulnerable to operational errors as the one involved in the accident at Three Mile Island, but there is plenty of room for improvement in safety measures in nuclear power stations in the European Economic Community. This conclusion comes from a report submitted to the European Commission's Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee on Nuclear Safety (CCNS). Many of the report's proposals are disputed by the committee in an accompanying reply.

The report comes from a four-man group set up by the European Commission after the Three Mile Island incident. The members of the group were H. Dunster, Deputy Director General of the UK Health and Safety Executive, Professor Latzko of the Technische Hogeschool Delft, Professor Smidt of the Institut für Reaktor Technik der Universität Karlsruhe, and Mr

S. Villani, Director General of the community's Joint Research Centre.

Conditions similar to those which led to the Three Mile Island accident have occurred on several occasions in Europe — the report criticizes the fact that these went almost unnoticed, and calls for a data bank recording all abnormal events in European nuclear power stations.

The siting of nuclear power stations is becoming increasingly politically sensitive in Europe. The report stresses that siting has only a limited part to play in protecting the population, but that there should be a consistent approach among member states to siting nuclear plants, especially in areas close to national borders.

The group also considers that more should be done to minimize the effects of any accidents that may occur: the Commission should study the emergency procedures operating in the various member states, there should be a review of the emergency plans made by the power station operating organizations before they are licenced to operate, and more attention should be given to ways of keeping the public informed in the event of an accident.

The European Commission is criticized for not responding rapidly enough to changing nuclear research needs, for setting up cumbersome committees, and for providing those committees with inadequate technical and administrative services.

According to the Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee, many of the recommendations in the report actually tie in with actions already taken by the Commission, or actions already under consideration. But the rather half-hearted attitude towards nuclear power expressed in the report is not welcomed by the committee. The report says: "no amount of care will totally eliminate the risks of this (nuclear), or any other sort of energy . . . (but) . . . we are finally led to the belief that nuclear sources should continue to play a significant part in the supply of Europe's energy."

Jasper Becker

### Fast reactors

### Low morale

Staff morale may be as much a threat to the British fast reactor programme as the prospect of a public inquiry on the project. The latest sign of this is the resignation of Mr Jack Moore, coordinator of the fast reactor programme at the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA), at the end of the year. Mr Moore, who is 57, is leaving to take up a post with Motor Columbus engineering consultants in Switzerland. He said earlier this week that at UKAEA he was unlikely to see his work of the past seven years come to fruition before his retirement.

Mr Moore's resignation highlights two potential problems for the staffing policy of the fast reactor team. Although no other

senior staff are reported to be leaving, further delay in a commitment to build a fast reactor may prompt others to go. The second problem is that of the age structure of the design team. Although the UKAEA has been expanding the team by bringing in young people, previous recruitment policies have left a noticeable dearth of people in their forties. When the senior staff retire or leave, their posts will have to be filled by much younger people.

A government statement on the commercial demonstration fast reactor has been expected since the summer. Sir John Hill, chairman of the authority until the end of the year, submitted a proposal to the government a year ago. Mr Moore expects that the government will respond shortly but that it will not make a final decision at this stage. One complication is that the government has not yet responded to the French proposal that Britain should buy into commercial exploitation of Super-Phénix.

Meanwhile, the Nuclear Power Company is nearing the completion of a detailed design study, which Mr Moore claims will be superior to current French and Russian designs. The UKAEA would like to submit it to the Central Electricity Generating Board and potential reactor manufacturers so that a site could be chosen and a total project proposal put to the government.

Judy Redfean

## Satellite communications

### Free for all ahead?

Washington

While the future of US remote-sensing satellites remains entangled in controversy (see *Nature* 14 August), the use of telecommunications satellites is poised for a dramatic expansion.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in Washington has given permission for the launching of 20 new domestic communications satellites, which are likely to increase the capacity of the present system by a factor of four by the mid-1980s.

At least one newspaper company is discussing plans for a nationwide system of locally-produced newspapers linked by satellite, while the Communications Satellite Corporation (Comsat), which owns three of the nine communications satellites at present in orbit, has proposed starting a four-satellite system beaming television programmes directly to private homes within the next few years.

FCC approval for the authorization of the new satellite launches was given unanimously, part of what commission chairman Charles Ferris described as an "open-entry policy" to provide satellite capacity to all who want it.

A separate report prepared by commission staff, for example, has recommended that direct-broadcast satellite television services should be subject to the minimum of regulation, in