

Dounreay fast reactor, and of the original composition of the rods. At the end of the year, some of these rods had been through reprocessing: here  $^{235}\text{U}$  can be measured easily only at the end of the flow, and by neutron activation analysis in the cans (which are stripped off at the beginning of the process).

When the 11 kg accounting loss was discovered, great efforts were made to recalculate the quantity and check measurements. The new figure was different (the authority will not release it) but it was agreed to keep to the original accounting value. However, the difference was great enough to indicate that the uncertainties in the original estimate were of the same order as its value — about 10 kg. For example, the recalculated figure for  $^{235}\text{U}$  in the original rods was 2 kg different from the first estimate.

However, still no calculation was made of the uncertainty, or "error", on the quantity. And this despite a statement a year ago by Dr A. G. Hamlin, director of the UKAEA Nuclear Materials Accounting Control Team, that "in order to determine whether MUF is really indicative of diversion of material, the safeguards authorities need to know, among other things, the expected level of errors. . . .".

Robert Walgate

## US research planning

### NIH reprieved

#### Washington

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) have avoided the threat of new legislation which would have placed much closer congressional surveillance and control on their research programmes, proposed earlier this year by the House of Representatives health and environment subcommittee (see *Nature*, 22 May).

After intense opposition from medical schools and research institutes — and despite the support of the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Mrs Patricia Harris — proposals put forward by Subcommittee chairman Henry Waxman were mostly dropped when the bill was agreed in final form by the House and the Senate.

Also dropped were equally controversial proposals put forward by Senator Edward Kennedy on the Senate side for a Presidential Commission on biomedical research priorities. Senator Kennedy had wanted to attach this to legislation which re-authorizes the operations of the National Cancer Institute and the National Institute for Heart, Lung and Blood, the only two of NIH's eleven institutes at present requiring such legislation.

NIH themselves opposed both innovations, but were told by Mrs Harris to sit on their hands. Opposition was subsequently led by groups such as the American Association of Medical Colleges, which argued that NIH should be given the greatest possible freedom to

decide on their research strategies.

NIH did not, however, escape completely unscathed. Included in the authorization bill are requirements for additional administrative arrangements covering diabetes research — a pet subject of retiring health subcommittee member Senator Richard Schweiker, expected to become Mr Reagan's Health Secretary — and for research on digestive diseases. NIH officials feel that one disadvantage of the changes proposed by Congressman Waxman is that regular re-authorization of NIH research funds makes it easier for such provisions to be attacked by individual congressmen.

David Dickson

## European environment

### Small gains

#### Brussels

Agreement has still not been reached by the Environmental Council of the EEC on two pieces of legislation: one concerning the prevention of industrial accidents and the other on the level of mercury discharge. However, new controls on whale imports, the recycling of waste paper, and wildlife habitation have been accepted.

At the meeting in Brussels on 12 December, the so-called "Séveso Directive" again foundered on the French intransigence over transfrontier notification procedures. It had been proposed that information on potentially hazardous plants near frontiers should be made available on a Community basis. The French would prefer notification of neighbouring states bilateral — an idea swiftly rejected by Belgium and Luxembourg. This disagreement is bound to step up the campaign against French nuclear reactors near the Belgium and Luxembourg borders.

The directive on mercury is also meeting resistance from France and Britain. The UK delegation insists that environmental quality objectives be used instead of standard emission limits to measure pollution. In the draft directive — the first to be based on the controversial directive on the control of discharges of dangerous substances into the aquatic environment — it was suggested that the United Kingdom stick to its use of quality controls while the other EEC states use the limit value approach. The French, however, object to this, feeling that pollution abatement costs should be the same throughout the Community. Both this and the industrial accident proposals will now go back to the Committee of Nine's Permanent Representatives for further discussion.

On the bonus side, from 1 January 1982 imports of commercial whale products will be banned. Would-be importers will have to apply for a licence not only for primary products but also for any goods (such as leather) which have been treated with a whale product. Denmark's insistence that

Greenland be excepted from this rule was accepted.

A recommendation obliging the nine member states to take steps to recycle waste paper and pulp was also adopted. Inks or glues which adversely affect the recycling process may fall victim should the legislation be seriously applied.

It was also agreed to finalize the Community's adherence both to the Strasbourg Convention (the Berne Convention) on the protection of European wildlife and their natural habitats and to the Geneva Convention on trans-frontier air pollution.

Jasper Becker

## High-energy physics

### New man, new style

The next director of DESY, the West German particle physics laboratory at Hamburg, will be 49-year-old Dr Volker Soergel, at present a member of the directorate of CERN, the European centre for particle physics in Geneva. Departing DESY director Professor Herwig Schopper announced the appointment during his leaving party at DESY last week.

Schopper moves to CERN in January as director-general; and Soergel will step into his shoes at DESY, even to the point of taking over his predecessor's professorship at the University of Hamburg. But from there on the similarities between the two individuals stop. Schopper had proved himself an extremely able politician in his period at DESY, but is less well known as a physicist; Soergel is a recognized expert on the weak decays of elementary particles, but has yet to learn the ways of Bonn.

However, he is by all accounts an extremely able administrator. According to one ex-CERN physicist, he could complete in ten minutes meetings that should have taken an hour — by resolving conflicts of interest beforehand. In this sense his style is ordered and Germanic. But at the same time, it is said, he can wax enthusiastic "and talk for hours about some harebrained scheme".

At DESY there are plenty of schemes, harebrained or not. A 30-beam synchrotron radiation laboratory opens in January; PETRA, the big electron-positron ring, is being pushed up to 22 GeV per beam in an attempt to find the elusive t-quark; superconducting magnets are being developed; and there are long-term plans for HERA, an 800-GeV proton on 35-GeV electron collider. But first, Soergel must find cash for DESY to pay its electricity bills (see *Nature* 4 December).

Being interested in the weak interaction, he will be keen to run PETRA at the energy where it can take data fastest on weak-electromagnetic interference, and check — in a hitherto impossible way — the Nobel-prize winning Weinberg-Salam unified theory of the weak and electromagnetic interactions. DESY physicists now