Oil tanker hazards

Inaction at sea

Brussels

The recently published Liberian report on the *Amoco Cadiz* disaster draws attention to the belief widely held in shipping circles that 80 per cent of accidents at sea are due to human error. In March 1978 the tanker went aground off the coast of Brittany spilling 230,000 tonnes of oil. And now the captain is to get his licence back despite his failure to send out a distress signal at the earliest opportunity.

Amoco Cadiz — what happens next time?

The incident prompted the European Commission to spend two and a half years in preparing a set of proposals on how such accidents could be prevented and cleaned up in the future. The proposals were published last June, and despite pressures from the French government they run the risk of never being accepted.

The most controversial issue concerns a requirement that member states should identify sub-standard ships using their own ports and order deficiencies to be rectified. Now that Greece has joined the European Community, 30 per cent of the world's shipping falls under Community jurisdiction. A recent debate in the European Parliament on the idea that the port state should check the standards of shipping ended in uproar, with the Greek representatives defending themselves against accusations that most defective ships were Greek-owned.

Conventions on shipping safety have already been established by the Inter-governmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO), but signatory countries have been slow to enforce them. The Commission's directive would make the IMCO conventions mandatory.

Dissatisfaction at the slow progress of both IMCO and European Commission proposals led France to hold a conference on shipping safety and pollution in

December last year. The Paris conference, which was attended by Spain, Portugal and Nordic countries as well as the European Community, set up a committee, which has been meeting in the Hague, with the declared aim of drawing up rules on the obligations of port states which would be acceptable to all European countries.

While these deliberations go on, the European Commission has made still more proposals, intended to stand more chance of being adopted quickly. One directive, already adopted, calls for all relevant data on tankers and their movements to be

stored on a computer. Another requires details of the contingency plans of all member states to be computerized, and the Commission wants to run training schemes and equipment testing programmes. Many such precautions are already in operation in the United States, causing operators with sub-standard ships to concentrate on European trade.

Whatever the various European Community bodies decide, nothing much is likely to happen for some time. The United Kingdom and Denmark still refuse to countenance giving the Community competence in this field.

In the meantime, France is still pressing for the £670 million estimated to be the cost of damages caused by the *Amoco Cadiz*.

Jasper Becker

US animal research

Stricter safeguards

Washington

Although the United States has so far avoided violent demonstrations against the use of animals in research such as those in Canada and the United Kingdom, public pressure for stricter safeguards is mounting. Three separate bills have been introduced in the new session of Congress. One, first introduced by Representative

Frederick Richmond in 1979, would permit the withdrawal of public funds from any research project in which laboratory animals were judged to be used unnecessarily.

The research community, and officials at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), are dismayed at the prospect of new regulations. At a meeting last month convened by NIH, scientists and animal welfare groups discussed the feasibility of the wider use of *in vitro* testing methods and mathematical modelling as alternatives to the use of live animals. Dr William Raub, associate director at NIH, said that he would approach the Office of Science and Technology Policy (if it survives under the new Administration) to suggest a regular forum for the discussion of alternatives to animals.

This proposal should at least satisfy Congressman George Brown, previously chairman of the House of Representatives Science and Research Committee, who came out in favour of more open discussion between scientists and their critics after a flood of correspondence supporting the Richmond bill. One of Mr Brown's objectives is to avoid trouble such as that in Canada, where radical anti-vivisectionists last year broke into National Research Council laboratories, setting free laboratory animals.

In the United States, protests against the widespread use of laboratory animals have taken the form of lobbying, led by groups such as United Action for Animals, based in New York.

One result so far stems from the campaign last year by more than 400 animal welfare groups against the Draize irritancy test for cosmetics, in which liquids are dropped on rabbits' eyes to test for inflammation. Revlon, one of the largest cosmetic manufacturers, was singled out for criticism and last November gave a \$750,000 grant to Rockefeller University to investigate cell culture alternatives.

The passage of new legislation will not, however, be straightforward. Present legislation goes back to the 1960s and is concerned with the care of laboratory animals, not with the tests to which they are subjected. The Scientists' Center for Animal Welfare is pressing for the wider adoption of a procedure already introduced by the Veterans Administration in which research proposals are vetted in advance to ensure that appropriate procedures are followed in the use of laboratory animals.

Mr Richmond's bill, the front runner in Congress, would establish a centre for the development of methods of research and testing not involving the use of live animals. Supporters of the bill say that such a centre could operate in much the same way as the National Toxicological Program, introduced three years ago, which coordinates research on toxic substances in the major federal agencies. The centre would have power to direct between