

US science R&D funding favours fifteen states

Washington Fifteen US states receive 80% of federal R&D dollars, with California, which received \$14.4 billion in 1998, at the head of the pack, according to a report released last week by the Rand Corporation. The report, which claims to be the first to identify and describe virtually all federally funded R&D activities within the states, was prepared for the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

Overall, says the report, more than \$80 billion a year is being spent on scientific R&D by the US government. In Maryland, 34% of the total federal funding came in support of R&D. But despite the concentration of funds, the report points out that for many smaller states, such as Rhode Island and New Hampshire, federal R&D funding on a per-capita basis is higher than in larger states receiving more federal R&D funds, such as Texas and Florida.

• <http://www.rand.org/hot/Press/FederalRD.html>

Russian ecologists in arms over vanishing ministries

Moscow Russian ecologists from more than 1,500 different professional organizations have united for the first time to protest against the disappearance of two ministries — ecology and forestry — from the new cabinet. They have also complained about the recent disbandment of the 'ecological police' by the ministry of home affairs, and the elimination of compulsory ecology courses in schools.

Boris Yatskevich, the minister of natural resources, said at a national conference on conservation last week that the cabinet's reorganization will help industry, which is suffering from "endless ecological regulations". But the 368 delegates at the conference sent a message to President Vladimir Putin and the Russian parliament arguing that the newly formed Ministry of Natural Resources should not be allowed both to exploit nature and to regulate this process.

UK research council comes under review

London The British government is to carry out a review of the activities of the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils (CCLRC), which provides large research facilities for UK science such as the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory near Oxford. The government has said that all relevant options will be considered, including abolition, privatization or "strategic contracting out".

The review will look at the charter, mission, contributions and past performance of the CCLRC. If the first stage

of review confirms the council's continued operation, a second stage will look at how its performance could be improved. The council, which employs 1,700 staff and has an annual turnover of £100 million (US\$150 million), was set up in 1995 when the former Science and Engineering Research Council was split up.

University open to offers for work on nuclear reactor

San Diego The University of California at Davis is seeking academic and commercial research proposals for a nuclear reactor recently acquired from the US Air Force (USAF). Materials science, biomedical research, isotope studies, nuclear engineering and neutron activation analysis in archaeology, anthropology, geochemistry and immunology are potential areas of study.

The university has \$500,000 in research funds available for studies at the neutron beam reactor, control of which was transferred earlier this year from the USAF (see *Nature* 316, 401; 1999). The reactor, located at the USAF's McClellan Air Force Base, about 20 miles from the university, was built in 1990.

Police extend scope of nerve-gas test inquiry

London Following hundreds of complaints about deaths and illnesses, British police are widening their investigations into chemical-warfare tests allegedly carried out on humans during the 1950s at a Ministry of Defence research centre. The inquiry into the Porton Down research centre is being led by local police and detectives from the ministry.

The investigation began when former servicemen alleged that they were tricked into volunteering for the tests, which subsequently damaged their health. The inquiry now involves at least one allegation of murder. The Wiltshire police are appealing to the government for help in funding the rising costs of the inquiry, which they say could last until the end of the year.

Radio astronomers increase their allotted frequencies

Istanbul After three years of planning by radio astronomers, delegates to the World Radio-communication Conference, which has just ended a month-long meeting in Istanbul, Turkey, have approved the first new dedicated frequency allocations for radio astronomy since 1979, when millimetre-wave astronomy was in its infancy.

The conference agreed to provide protection for all the frequencies between 71 and 275 gigahertz (GHz) currently used by radio astronomers, adding more than 90 GHz of spectrum to the 44 GHz already set



Radio telescopes are boosted by frequency gain.

aside in this frequency range. "It's a win for millimetre-wave science," says John Whiteoak of the Australia Telescope National Facility. "This secures its future."

Los Alamos breathes a sigh of relief

San Diego Two computer hard drives loaded with international nuclear-weapon secrets that had been embarrassingly 'lost' by the Los Alamos National Laboratory (see *Nature* 405, 725; 2000) mysteriously reappeared last week when they were found behind a photocopier in a secure area.

The circumstances surrounding the discovery of the missing hard drives in an area previously searched prompted some authorities to suspect that one of the scientists with access to the X Division area surreptitiously returned them. The events prompted some Congressmen to call for the resignation of the Department of Energy secretary, Bill Richardson. He rejected the call, saying he is trying to balance the needs of science and security at the laboratory.

Photon project harnesses high-schools' PC power

Munich Pupils at 73 high schools in the German state of Baden-Württemberg, as well as 1,100 individuals, are making their personal computers (PCs) available online to a simulation of the spreading of X-ray photons set up by the University of Tübingen. The project has been launched by the state science ministry to increase the public understanding of astrophysical research, but will also assist astrophysicists in carrying out simulations aimed at understanding the nature of X-ray pulsars.

The project, called XPulsar@home, is modelled on the successful SETI project in the United States, which makes use of the unused computer capacity of around 950,000 PCs to search for extraterrestrial intelligence (see *Nature* 400, 804; 1999). Pupils' participation will be kept alive by a competition between high schools for the highest number of simulations carried out.