

FASEB rejects OSI rules

Washington

THE US Public Health Service Office of Scientific Integrity Review, which oversees the handling by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) of scientific misconduct investigations, has been overwhelmed by the response of the scientific community to its publication of rules for the operation of NIH's controversial Office of Scientific Integrity (OSI). But of some 1,800 responses received so far, it seems that only a handful are distinct comments. The vast majority of the responses were apparently modelled closely on a draft letter suggested by the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB), a vigorous opponent of OSI.

OSI's rules were published for the first time in June (see *Nature* 351, 595; 20 June 1991), in an attempt to forestall further legal challenges to OSI, after a Wisconsin court declared the office's rules illegal. That decision centred on OSI's supposed violation of the accused's rights to 'due process', including the right to cross-examine witnesses. To formalize

OSI's procedures, the new rules stated explicitly that researchers under investigation may not confront other witnesses interviewed by OSI.

Late last month, Robert Cousins, the president of FASEB, wrote to the federation's members, urging them to protest against the OSI rules, and included a draft letter on which to base their comments. This letter catalogues a range of objections to the OSI rules, including the vexing question of due process for the accused and the lack of provision for sanctions against whistleblowers who make groundless accusations. FASEB would like to see OSI's role in misconduct investigations much reduced: "knowledgeable investigators with experience in the practice of science are in a far better position than bureaucrats" to weigh evidence of scientific fraud, the draft letter says. But few NIH observers believe that the Public Health Service, under pressure from Congress to increase OSI's resources, will respect FASEB's desire to lessen the influence of the office.

Peter Aldhous

Blast sets back H-II

Tokyo

JAPANESE engineers working through the night to develop Japan's next-generation H-II rocket suffered a serious setback during the early hours of 9 August when part of the rocket's main engine blew up during pressure tests and killed a 23-year-old engineer. The accident is the latest in a string of mishaps to hit the H-II. A series of fires during test firings of the rocket's main engine have already forced the National Space Development Agency to postpone the first launch of the rocket by a year to 1993. And to maintain the revised schedule, the agency's contractors are working around the clock — the accident occurred at 1:05 a.m.

Despite the accident, which occurred at pressures below the design tolerance of the engine, the space agency insists that it will maintain the present launch schedule.

D.S.

Commercial launch

REGARDLESS of the problems with the H-II rocket (see above), a private company that will contract out launches of the rocket has submitted bids to the International Maritime Satellite Organization (INMARSAT) for the launch of two satellites in 1995.

Rocket System Corporation, a consortium of 75 companies, last week submitted bids to INMARSAT's head office in London to launch marine communication satellites for the organization in July and November 1995. Company officials are confident the H-II will be operational by 1995. But they have requested the option to nullify any contracts if the development of the H-II is delayed.

Both INMARSAT and the International Telecommunications Satellite Organization (INTELSAT) have been encouraging Japan to submit bids for satellite launches using the H-II so that the organizations will have alternatives to the European Ariane rocket and US rockets (see *Nature* 350, 450; 1991).

D.S.

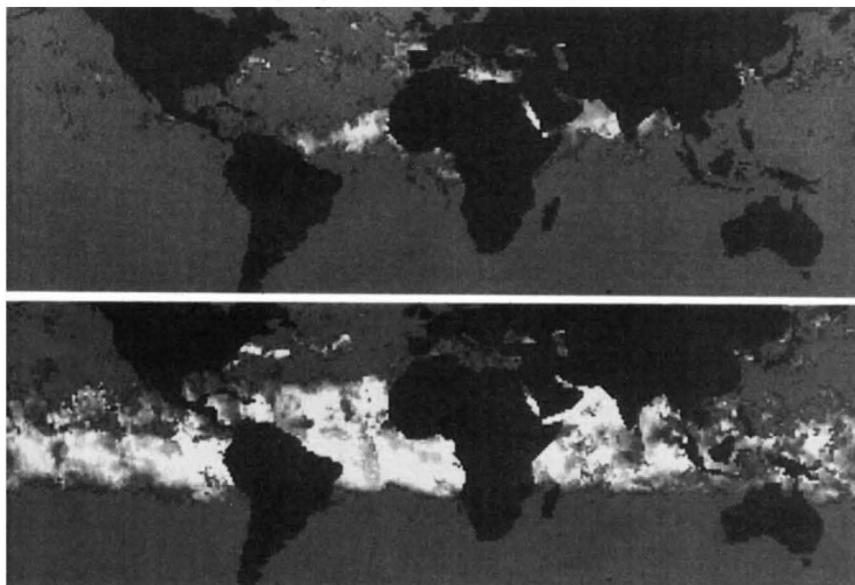
Wanted: astronauts

JAPAN'S National Space Development Agency is dismayed that only a handful of Japanese have applied to become astronauts for the Japanese module of the US space station, which is due to begin operations at the end of this decade. In 1985, when the agency recruited candidates to ride aboard the US space shuttle, more than 500 people applied for the three positions available.

But this time, one week after the deadline for applications, only 17 have expressed interest. Some agency officials blame the poor response on uncertainty over the future of the US space station. But an alternative explanation may be inadequate advertising.

D.S.

Before and after



These images from a US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) polar orbiting satellite illustrate the aerosol cloud thrown into the stratosphere by the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines. Vernon Kousky from NOAA's Climate Analysis Center estimates that when the cloud becomes more evenly distributed through the stratosphere during the Northern Hemisphere winter, it may depress the mean global temperature by some 0.5° C. Judging by the effects of the last comparable volcanic event — the 1982 eruption of El Chichón in Mexico, which threw out about half the amount of dust as Pinatubo — global temperatures may be affected for the next two to four years, Kousky says. But, he adds, the effect will probably be undetectable because of the normal variability in climate.

The NOAA-11 satellite carries a high-resolution radiometer that can measure the reflection in the visible spectrum from dust and haze in the atmosphere, but only above the ocean, and only when the atmosphere below is cloudless. In the first image, compiled in early June, most of the reflectivity is from dust blown from the Saharan and Arabian deserts. The second, compiled over the week ending 25 June, shows the aerosol cloud from Pinatubo, spread into a belt surrounding the tropics.

P.A.