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ice. Airports want to know wind speeds, and energy suppliers care about temperature, especially longer-term events such as unusually mild winters.

Meteorologists also caution that data from some rural areas are patchy, and that some aspects of weather will be hard to quantify. "The state of the sky is the most difficult," says John Thornes of the University of Birmingham, UK. Many providers forecast the cloud cover, but most measurements are generated visually by airport employees.

Despite these barriers, many users of forecasts contacted by *Nature* welcomed the society's survey plans. Major companies such as supermarkets and energy suppliers already run their own assessments of the forecasts that they buy, but say an independent set of metrics would be a useful addition.

Even forecasts from reputable providers can vary considerably in their accuracy, says Gearoid Lane of Centrica, an energy and services company based in Windsor, UK. If the forecasts are wrong, he adds, "there are big financial consequences". ■

Jim Giles

## NIH hints at ethics rule change

### WASHINGTON DC

Researchers who had threatened to walk away from top jobs at the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) over tough ethical rules have now changed their minds.

The scientists say they have been privately assured by NIH director Elias Zerhouni that they will not have to divest themselves of all their biomedical stock. It is unclear how such assurances will be reconciled with the rules, introduced in February as an interim measure after a series of scandals over possible conflicts of interest. It is not known whether the stock rules will be changed.

The NIH announced last week that David Schwartz, a physician at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, would head the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. Earlier reports said that he was turning the job down because of rules against holding stock in certain situations.

And James Battey, who in March announced his intention to resign as head

of the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, changed his mind after a meeting with Zerhouni in early May. Battey was in the running to head the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, which manages the state's stem-cell initiative.

Battey had said he was resigning because he managed a family trust fund that included biomedical stock. "I received reassurance from the NIH director that I would be able to continue my responsibility to my family and remain at the NIH," he now says.

Reviews of the regulations are ongoing at the NIH and its parent department, Health and Human Services. Many — including congressional representatives, scientific organizations, and Zerhouni himself — have said that the interim rules go too far. Permanent rules are not expected until next February. ■

Emma Marris