

Senator backs halfway houses for nuclear waste

A powerful US senator has proposed building temporary storage facilities for nuclear waste around the country.

Frustrated by delays to building a permanent waste repository at Yucca Mountain in Nevada (see *Nature* 440, 987–989; 2006), Senator Pete Domenici (Republican, New Mexico) is advocating temporary “consolidation and preparation” facilities. The proposal, which Domenici included in a Senate appropriations bill last week, would instruct the Department of Energy to draw up plans for the facilities in states with nuclear power stations. Nuclear waste is currently stored on site at the plants.

Germany and Sweden already have such facilities. “There are no technical barriers to interim storage,” says Kevin Crowley, who directs the Nuclear and Radiation Studies Board of the National Academy of Sciences in Washington DC. But, he warns, building and licensing facilities around the country will be “very expensive”.

Flying telescope takes one step forward, two back

The Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy (SOFIA) has got the go-ahead from NASA — but the project is still firmly on the ground.

NASA gave the long-delayed programme, which would deploy a plane carrying a 2.5-metre infrared telescope, the thumbs-up during a crucial review on 15 June. But programme scientists say SOFIA may be tested at NASA's Dryden facility in southern California rather than at Ames Research Center in Moffett Field, California, where the project is based — a change that could push the first science flights back to 2010.

Dana Backman, outreach coordinator for the project, says the team still hopes to be doing science by July 2008. According to NASA, the plane was intended to be operational by 2004. But any delay may become moot if no funds can be found for the project at NASA, which has suffered cuts to its science budget. SOFIA is a collaboration between the agency and the German Aerospace Center.

Tsunami warning system goes online in Indian Ocean

The Indian Ocean's early-warning system for tsunamis is up and running. The US\$2-million system, set up and coordinated by the United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) after the 2004 tsunami, consists of a seismic network,



Despite an early warning system, people may still be at risk from tsunamis in the Indian Ocean.

a set of buoys, and several anchored deep-sea instruments that measure the power and propagation of waves.

All data are sent in real time to the Pacific tsunami warning centres in Japan and Hawaii. If there is a quake big enough to cause a tsunami in the Indian Ocean, these centres will warn authorities in 24 affected countries. Four nations bordering the Indian Ocean — Somalia, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — are not yet linked in to the system.

But because the flow of information from local authorities to people at risk is still unresolved, the system may not yet be able to save lives. If a tsunami were to strike tonight, millions living near beaches would not be alerted in time, says UNESCO spokeswoman Sue Williams. An intergovernmental group will discuss this and other problems at a meeting in Bali from 31 July to 2 August.

US biologist who faked data faces a year in jail

For the first time, a US researcher has received a jail sentence for faking data on grant applications to the National Institutes of Health.

On 28 June, in a federal court in Vermont, physiologist Eric Poehlman was sentenced to

one year and a day after he pleaded guilty last year to making false statements to secure a \$542,000 grant on hormone replacement for women (see *Nature* 434, 424; 2005). He is to report to federal prison by the end of August, unless he appeals against the sentence.

After being accused of fabricating data in 17 grant applications worth \$11.6 million and publishing ten articles with falsified data, Poehlman struck a plea deal for the offences, committed while he was working at the University of Vermont in Burlington and the University of Maryland in Baltimore.

Poehlman, who resigned from his job at the University of Montreal, Canada, early last year, has retracted the articles, returned \$180,000 to the government, and paid \$16,000 in attorney's fees for Walter DeNino, the young researcher who blew the whistle on him.

Hubble camera working again after 11-day hiatus

One of the Hubble Space Telescope's cameras is scanning the cosmos again, after an electronics glitch shut it down for nearly two weeks.

On 30 June, engineers switched to back-up power for the Advanced Camera for Surveys, which stopped working on 19 June. Hubble's three main other instruments had continued working normally.

No crucial observations were lost while the camera was offline, says David Leckrone of the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, Hubble's senior project scientist. When it shut down, it had been slated to make follow-up observations on the Hubble Ultra Deep Field, a survey of distant galaxies. That work will now be rescheduled for the autumn.

Answer from 'Faking it' on page 8

The response from Harry Collins was answer B.

Villagers and museums wrangle over bear's body

The corpse of Bruno the bear is in high demand, but will probably end up as a teaching tool.

Bruno (right) was part of a programme to reintroduce the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) to the Italian Alps, but he went rogue and headed north to Bavaria. On 26 June he was shot near an Alpine lake by a hunter.

Gunther von Hagens, creator of exhibitions that display the flayed and plastinated bodies of humans and animals, offered to donate €10,000 (US\$12,800) to an animal-welfare organization for Bruno's flesh. Villages close to where he was shot have also put in claims.

But Bavaria's environment ministry says Bruno will be put to more dignified use, for



“teaching and biological research”. His stuffed fur will be displayed at the Museum for People and Nature in Munich, and his skeleton and inner organs retained for student instruction.

A tissue sample has also been sent for DNA analysis — just to make sure it is the right bear.