Embattled IBM paper published after court row

It took a fight in court, but a controversial paper that links working in an IBM factory to increased rates of cancer has finally been published.

The work analyses nearly 32,000 people who had been employed by IBM, and suggests that workers died from certain cancers at significantly higher rates than seen in the general US population (R. W. Clapp *Environ. Health* doi:10.1186/1476-069X-5-30; 2006).

Two years ago, the journal *Clinics in Occupational and Environmental Medicine* refused to publish the work, saying it was unsuited to a review journal. Journal contributors alleged that the publisher had succumbed to pressure from IBM, an allegation the publisher denied (see *Nature* 429, 687; 2004).

The data were released as part of a lawsuit against IBM, in which the author — Richard Clapp, a professor of environmental health at the Boston University School of Public Health in Massachusetts — acted as an expert witness. IBM has argued that the data were methodologically flawed and released for use only in the court case. Clapp says a New York court gave him the go-ahead this spring to publish.

Iceland breaks ban on commercial whaling

Icelandic fisheries officials announced on 17 October that they intend to resume commercial whaling, allowing the catch of 30 minke and 9 fin whales by the end of August 2007. Within days, whalers went ahead and took their first kill: an endangered fin whale.

The International Whaling Commission, which has had a moratorium on commercial whaling since 1986, estimates that there are some 25,000 fin whales in central North Atlantic waters, and more than 40,000 minke in Iceland's coastal waters. Iceland's ministry of fisheries argues that the proposed catch is sustainable. But conservationists and other governments have criticized the move.

Norway is the only other nation that allows commercial whaling, taking some 600 minke per year. Inuit hunters from Greenland and Canada also take a small number of whales, and Japan and Iceland undertake controversial scientific hunts.

Physicist retires to work on 9/11 conspiracy theories

A physics professor known for his theories that bombs, not planes, destroyed the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 is retiring from his position at Brigham Young University in Utah.

University officials had placed Steven Jones on paid leave last month while reviewing his work on 9/11 conspiracy theories. On 20 October, while the review was still under way, the university announced that Jones had reached an agreement to take early retirement. Jones says he plans to continue his 9/11 research.

The researcher supports his theories with analyses of soil and metals retrieved from the collapsed World Trade Center, but the university's faculty and others have questioned the rigour of his research. The American Association of University Professors questioned the university's decision to place Jones on leave while reviewing his work, saying it infringed his academic freedom.

Agent of Singapore's drive to biomedicine steps down

Can Singapore's leading research organization survive the departure of its charismatic leader? Philip Yeo, the chairman of Singapore's Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR), has announced that he will be stepping down in March 2007. He is to become chairman of the Standards, Productivity and Innovation Board, and a science adviser to the minister for trade and industry.

The thriving Biopolis science complex in Singapore is to get a new chairman.

Yeo has been the driving force behind the creation of the city-state's thriving Biopolis complex, a collection of bioscience institutes that has drawn international talent (see *Nature* 436, 767–768; 2005). David Lane, who heads the Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology within A*STAR, says that Biopolis is now well enough established to attract top names without Yeo. "We seem to have passed some barrier of critical mass now as we have loads of unsolicited applications," he says.

Yeo's successor, Lim Chuan Poh, who has held science-policy-related positions within A*STAR and at the education ministry, is popular with Yeo fans and critics alike. One of the latter says Poh seems to be "inclusive, progressive and impressive — an excellent choice".

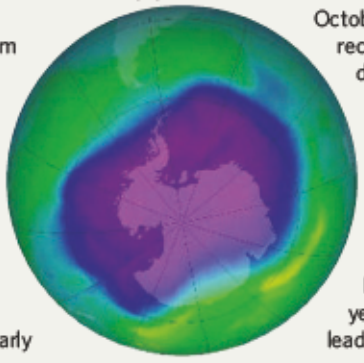
European weather satellite reaches polar orbit

Europe has launched the first of three polar-orbiting weather satellites, which will eventually be joined by a long-troubled US satellite system.

After several delays, the MetOp-A satellite was launched from the Baikonur launch facility in Kazakhstan on 19 October. It now sweeps around the globe from pole to pole 14 times a day, and should soon start transmitting data from a variety of instruments — including a water-vapour profiler and a spectrometer to measure trace gases such as ozone.

It joins a cluster of polar-orbiting satellites operated by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. These are meant to be replaced by an $11-billion system jointly operated with NASA and the US military, but delays and cost overruns have threatened those plans in recent years (see *Nature* 441, 798; 2006).

Antarctic ozone hole is bigger than ever



NASA

As ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons fade from the atmosphere, the ozone hole over the Antarctic continues to fluctuate in size. And this year, it was the biggest it has ever been.

Both NASA and the European Space Agency documented the size of the 2006 ozone hole and found that, in late September and early October, it had broken records for both size and depth, previously set in 2000 and 1998. This image, taken on 24 September, shows the hole at an extent of 29 million square kilometres.

Temperatures above the Antarctic have been the lowest this year since 1979, which helped lead to the record ozone loss.