

■ News Briefs

NRC Changing Rules on Storage of Radioactive Waste

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) has proposed new requirements for the on-site storage of low-level radioactive waste that would ban long-term storage unless the power reactor, hospital, or other licensee documents that it has exhausted all other "reasonable" options for dealing with the waste.

Storage of short-lived radioactive refuse for decaying it to background levels would still be permitted. The law, in fact, is unlikely to have much influence since the Supreme Court has voided the main enforcement provision of the Low-Level Radioactive Waste Policy Act. The NRC is now barred from requiring states to take title to low-level waste, which makes the proposed rule "little more than the agency's statement of principle," according to the trade publication *Nuclear News*.

If approved, the new rule will take effect January 1, 1996. The proposed restrictions are written as standard con-

ditions in licenses for nuclear reactors, materials, fuel cycle, and spent-fuel storage. Licensees would not be required to submit formal documentation to be able to store low-level wastes, but each licensee would have to maintain records showing the steps taken to comply with the rule.

Only two disposal sites for low-level radioactive waste remain in operation in the U.S. Since the commissions that control both of these privately-operated burial dumps decided to restrict access to the sites, effective January 1, 1993, many university research laboratories, hospitals, drug companies, and the nuclear power companies that produce the vast majority of low-level radioactive waste, are preparing to store low-level wastes for at least the next four years (see *JNM, Newslines*, December 1992, p. 25N).

When the Barnwell, South Carolina site closes altogether in 1996, storage of radioactive waste may be the only option for industries and research labs in all but a handful of northwestern states with access to the disposal grounds in Hanford, Washington.

NRC Chairman Ivan Selin says the proposed rule accommodates the precariously developing situation. "We believe that on-site storage should only be allowed as a last resort to disposal after January 1, 1996," he said in a January 1993 speech to the Low-Level Radioactive Waste Forum. "There are real, practical, and safety limitations to the viability of storage as an option."

Selin warned that the experience with high-level nuclear waste has shown that storage alone "will not be tolerated indefinitely." But he expressed confidence that the basic federal policy of state responsibility for low-level waste will prevail, and that under the Low-Level Radioactive Waste Policy Act, new disposal facilities will eventually be developed. He declined, however, to predict just how long development of new sites is likely to take.

Scientists Seek Radioactive Snake Venom

A pair of Russian scientists are resorting to an unusual method for assessing environmental radioactive contamination: counting radioactivity in snake

**TECHNOLOGIST
JOB
NETWORK**

The New England Chapter of the SNM-TS announces "The Job Hotline," a national toll-free hotline for nuclear medicine. The hotline is designed to provide a quick link for technologists seeking jobs and for hospitals seeking technologists. Institutions seeking technologists should call the hotline number, leave the name of the institution, title of the job opening, and name and number of the contact person. Data are then stored for three months in a database for anyone who calls the hotline seeking employment. Technologists seeking employment should call the hotline number, specify states which are of interest, specify type of job desired, and leave a name and address. A listing will then be sent out in 48 hours; all inquiries are kept confidential. If an opening has not been filled within three months, the institution should call again to have it relisted. The institution should also call if an opening has been filled so that it can be deleted from the database. The hotline numbers are **1-800-562-6387 (1-800-JOB-NETS)** or **1-990-4212** in Maine. Questions or comments should be directed to: Tom Starno, Manager, Job Hotline, SNM-TS New England Chapter, at **(207) 945-7186**.

The Mideastern Chapter of the SNM-TS will provide a referral network for technologists seeking employment and for hospitals in need of technologists. Interested individuals should call Robert Steinman at **(302) 421-4365**. Please leave your name, address, phone number, and a brief description of your request.

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Editor's Note: SNM Chapters are invited to submit job referral service listings for publication. Pertinent information, such as name, a brief description of the service, telephone numbers, addresses if desired, and name and number of contact person for inquiries should be sent to Mark A. Newman, Section Editor, *JNM/JNMT*, Society of Nuclear Medicine, 136 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016-6760.

venom. Strapped for funds, they are asking western importers of snake venom from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) for help.

The scientists are trying to make up for records, lost or kept secret, detailing radioactive contamination from accidents at nuclear power plants, military test explosions, and uncontrolled dumping of radioactive waste.

Snakes absorb elements like strontium, cesium and cobalt, which concentrate in the venom. Calcium, which is chemically similar to strontium, for example, is a natural constituent of venom. Snakes exposed to ^{90}Sr accumulate the radioisotope as readily as calcium. Andrey A. Nedospasov of the Russian Academy of Sciences and Alexandr V. Cherkasov of the Russian Research Centre say that exported venom is "highly likely" to be contaminated with radioactivity. Indeed, Russian custom agents impounded a shipment of venom recently because of its high radioactivity.

Venom from the adder, or common European viper, (*V. berus*), is collected

throughout the CIS (formerly the Soviet Union), and delivered to foreign customers for research and medicinal use, although no medicine sold in the U.S. uses snake toxins.

Venoms are used to immunize animals to generate antivenom serum. Proteins unique to snake poison include a variety of potent neurotoxins, blood cell toxins, and endotheliotoxins. Some venoms contain antibodies that clump red blood cells together and can be used to control bleeding or to test in vitro for deficiencies of blood coagulation factors.

Remarkable among cold-blooded animals, the adder travels as far north as the Arctic Circle, preferring the forests of the Carpathian, Balkan, and Caucasus Mountains. The overall contamination of its range could, in principle, be estimated accurately by measuring the radioactivity of the venom, according to Nedospasov and Cherkasov. But they face dwindling support for their project due to the "general economic crisis" gripping the CIS. They are asking people in the West

who obtain snake venom from the CIS to measure the radioactivity and send the results, along with the territory and date of collection, to their institutes in Moscow. "These results will be of great value for people living on contaminated territories and for ecological monitoring," the scientists wrote in the February 4, 1993 issue of the journal *Nature*. They further noted that "the information could also be important for saving natural *V. berus* populations."

SNM's OHCP Publishes Bulletin on Health Care Policy

SNM's Office of Health Care Policy (OHCP) mailed copies of its first issue of *Health Care Policy Bulletin* to all SNM members this January. Those interested in receiving further issues of the newsletter should write to Sheryl Stern, Office of Health Care Policy, P.O. Box 123, Elmwood Park, NJ 07407.