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scientific information. "Biomedical research has benefited tremendously from the free exchange of information between scientists," he says. But today, with the importance of corporate funding and patent rights, King adds that many of his colleagues "are less willing to talk about their research results."

Again pointing a finger at Washington, King says it is not surprising that universities and faculty members are entering compromising agreements. "If public funds were available, university researchers could be more selective, more cautious about the arrangements into which they enter." □

Another siege of EPA, pesticides and cancer

A review of the policy that federal pesticide regulators use in assessing cancer risk to people is likely to erupt into a brouhaha when the House Agriculture subcommittee, chaired by Representative George E. Brown, Jr. (D., Calif.), meets next month. Staff director Charles Benbrook has already given the subcommittee a report charging that the Environmental Protection Agency's risk assessment for pesticides is too flexible. And EPA Assistant Administrator John A. Todhunter has responded that the report is "a political diatribe."

The argument again pits proponents of a "zero-risk" approach against advocates of an approach that weighs potential risks against the benefits of using a given pesticide, a position generally supported by industry.

The industry's concern. Pesticide manufacturers worry that changes in the law could make it more difficult to register their products. Currently, EPA has registered more than 1,200 pesticides that are made into more than 30,000 substances. Pesticide shipments now run nearly \$5.4 billion/year, with the fastest growth in herbicides. Randal Schumacher of the Chemical Manufacturers Assn. says that Benbrook "is definitely from the old school. He certainly holds the traditional government view that cancer risk of any magnitude ought to be eliminated."

In the other camp is Jay Feldman, national coordinator of the National Coalition Against Misuse of Pesticides (Washington, D.C.), who contends that any risk of human cancer should be abolished because regulators are dealing with people's lives. "What was so clear back then—that 'zero' exposure is the only acceptable exposure—is not be-

ing honored by this Administration," Feldman says. "I think Benbrook is right on target."

The Benbrook report says that EPA has decided to accept as tolerable "a level of risk 100 times higher than levels routinely accepted in the past." Benbrook says the agency now accepts estimated risk levels of up to 1 cancer per 10,000 population, whereas previous administrations—Democratic and Republican—used a 1-cancer-per-1-million-population standard.

Insufficient evidence. The report further charges that EPA conducts studies of the oncogenicity, or potential for causing tumors, of pesticides in a way that can exclude information important in determining risk. The agency, Benbrook says, routinely conducts risk assessments on pesticides that cause malignant tumors, but does not extend the same attention to benign tumor problems. "The agency assumes that, in certain instances, a statistically significant increase in benign tumors is 'insufficient evidence' of a chemical's potential to cause cancer in man."

More troubling, the congressman says, is that agency officials are willing to tilt their regulatory deliberations. EPA, he complains, is trying "to incorporate the proposition that negative experimental evidence can cancel the significance of certified, positive evidence of oncogenicity."

The Benbrook report also criticizes EPA for allegedly misusing the classification system for oncogenicity, sponsored by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in France. Agency officials improperly interpret the IARC program's "limited evidence" category as meaning "limited or no risk to man," the document says.

Todhunter scoffs at such allegations. In his interpretation of cancer policy, he says that he is merely trying to be a

pragmatic scientist when a test indicates an increase in tumors. "The report," says Todhunter, "seems to conclude that one positive test showing a statistically significant increase in tumors should drive the entire risk assessment, no matter how much additional information is available or how well the test is conducted. We think," he adds, "that when the agency has other contradictory information, the weight of evidence may not support taking regulatory action."

The toxics chief notes that the judg-



Todhunter is striving to be pragmatic.

ment of EPA toxicologists plays a large role in sorting out evidence and making a reasonable risk judgment. EPA, he says, clearly adheres to the spirit of the agency's cancer policy. "It was meant to be a program capable of accommodating an ever-advancing state of the art." EPA, Todhunter adds, believes that tools for weighing regulatory evidence have become more accurate at very low levels of detection, and "decisions, in turn, have involved increasingly complicated risk assessments." □

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