

### Ecoterrorists arrested ahead of arson attack

Two groups of radical US environmentalists — both linked to threats or attacks on researchers — have been targeted in a crackdown on ecoterrorism.

On 13 January, three people were arrested in the parking lot of a Kmart store in California after buying supplies that could have been used to make bombs. Federal officials say the group was planning to set fire to the US Forest Service's Institute of Forest Genetics in Placerville. The lab houses 25 researchers in a facility that has been used for forest research since the 1920s.

A week later, 11 people were indicted for a series of arson attacks between 1996 and 2001. They included a 2001 bombing at a University of Washington horticulture lab in Seattle that cost millions of dollars in damages and set several research programmes back years.

Both groups have been linked to the nebulous Earth Liberation Front, an ecoterrorism group founded in Britain in the 1990s that uses sabotage to stop what it sees as exploitation of the natural environment.

### Sandia takes lead role on nuclear-waste site

Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico is to lead the research and technical work at the troubled US\$5.8-billion Yucca Mountain nuclear-waste repository in Nevada.

The 18 January announcement names Sandia as the successor to a consortium led by defence contractor Bechtel. Sandia, which also conducts nuclear-weapons research, will receive around \$60 million in annual funding for scientific research into the repository.

In 1987, Yucca Mountain was designated as the site of a permanent national nuclear-waste repository. Last spring, a string of e-mails from project scientists called into question the legitimacy of some environmental data taken at the site (see *Nature* 434, 427; 2005).



Warm welcome? Yucca Mountain science will soon be run by Sandia National Laboratories.

### Europe's Sun mission eclipsed by budget shortfall

The European Space Agency should postpone its plans to send a spacecraft to the Sun, say scientists asked by the agency how it should make best use of its science budget.

A funding shortfall in the agency's science programme had led to speculation that missions may be cancelled (see *Nature* 438, 542-543; 2005). But on 19 January, its space-science advisory committee endorsed projects already in the pipeline, including the Gaia satellite and the BepiColombo mission to Mercury. It also said it will back a call for proposals for the next generation of missions.

All this is possible if the planned launch of the Solar Orbiter (pictured) is pushed back four years to 2017, says Giovanni Bignami, the committee's chairman. He will put the case to the science programme committee, which



makes the final decision, on 8-9 February.

Separately, NASA has announced that budget problems have indefinitely postponed the launch of the Dawn mission, which was to have lifted off in June to study the asteroids Ceres and Vesta.

### Doctors attack constraints on access to patients' data

Medical research in Britain is being delayed or blocked by the patchwork of regulatory bodies and laws that controls access to patients' records, doctors have warned.

In a 17 January report, the Academy of Medical Sciences says that steps must be taken to help researchers deal with the array of regulatory barriers. Access to patients' records is controlled by laws including the 1998 Data Protection Act and bodies such as the General Medical Council. Studies on some issues, such as the incidence of cancer among former soldiers, have already been affected by overzealous regulation, epidemiologists warn.

The academy says regulatory bodies are being overprotective and it wants the UK Clinical Research Collaboration, which promotes research within the country's National Health Service, to take the lead in simplifying access to records.

### Tobacco giant sponsors work on DNA repair

In a move that seems to break its own promise not to fund medical research, the Philip Morris Foundation has awarded €25,000 (US\$31,000) to a chemist at the University of Munich who works on DNA repair.

Anti-smoking lobbies in Germany have campaigned against the four prizes that Philip Morris awards each year in the country, arguing that the research might be used to promote the interests of the tobacco lobby. The Philip Morris Foundation insists that it should be allowed to sponsor work that has nothing to do with smoking.

DNA repair is an acceptable theme, the foundation says, because it has many applications outside medicine. The prizewinner, Thomas Carell, points out that he works nearly exclusively on plants.

Other researchers see a direct connection. Some chemicals, such as those in tobacco smoke, can cause DNA damage, which can lead to cancer if DNA repair mechanisms are overwhelmed.

### Computer network focuses on marine genomes

A high-capacity computer system for analysing genomic data from marine microbes should be available to scientists by this autumn.

The creation of the Community Cyberinfrastructure for Advanced Marine Microbial Ecology Research and Analysis, or CAMERA, was announced on 17 January. The \$24.5-million endeavour will be funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.

CAMERA is a joint project of the University of California, San Diego, and the J. Craig Venter Institute in Rockville, Maryland. The university will house the computer hardware, which will be accessible worldwide through fibre-optic networks.

The system will be used to analyse the metagenomics of marine microbes — looking at microbial genomic sequence data in the context of other species.

**Correction**  
The Editorial "Ethics and fraud" (*Nature* 439, 117-118; 2006) wrongly stated that Thereza Imanishi-Kari worked in the laboratory of David Baltimore. Imanishi-Kari had collaborated with Baltimore, but ran her own laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.