

centring on radiation effects, will be held in Paris in October 1984. The project has an office at the Department of Chemistry, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, Essex CO4 3SQ, England, UK, where a writing session is planned for early in the summer of 1985.

The Steering Committee is aiming for a final report to be issued during the summer of 1985, and does not expect to release any of its findings until then. The matter is of such importance, and speculation about the range and magnitude of

effects is unfolding so rapidly, that prudence suggests no publication until the full appraisal has been completed.

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### 'Bombing' Forest Fires: A Proposed Technology

A West German engineer has developed the concept of a 'bomb' approach to controlling fires that spread through large natural areas. Dipl.-Ing. Malay Modak, of West Berlin, suggests that plexiglass spheres filled with compressed carbon dioxide and nitrogen, when dropped into burning areas, can serve as effective fire-extinguishers by releasing fire-smothering gases.

Modak's proposal is of scientific interest from the viewpoint of increasing efficiency of aerial fire-extinguishing efforts. Spreading water from airplanes, the traditional approach, requires heavy loading of fire-fighting aircraft from sources which must be relatively close to fires. Dropped water often misses its target or is rapidly dissipated by the heat of the flames that it aims to douse; and the closer a fire-fighting aircraft comes to a fire, the more dangerous the mission becomes. The idea of solid containers of extinguishant which could be dropped directly into a fire, with high probability that it would not be released until reaching the hottest part of the flames, is thus of appeal. In Modak's approach, hundreds of plexiglass 'bombs', which would resemble small earth-satellites (complete with protruding rods to prevent the balls from rolling) could simply be loaded into the holds of fire-fighting aircraft and released into pinpointed areas. The 'bombs' would not degrade until reaching the heart of the fire, at which time they would explode, causing layers of carbon dioxide to spread over the flames, as well as nitrogen gas to help promote an inert

atmosphere for retarding or slowing combustion.

The major drawbacks of the bomb approach are *materials* and *money*. What Modak is proposing, essentially, is a system of throwaway fire extinguishers, which are strong enough to contain compressed gases under non-fire conditions. Finding the right materials at the right price would pose a challenge; insufficient materials and poor bomb-design would mean premature explosion of the devices, with costly and potentially disastrous results. At the same time, high-strength bombs would most probably be prohibitively expensive.

It would appear that some laboratory-scale work on fire-extinguishing bombs of the proposed nature might be worth while. They could conceivably prove to be effective components of thermally-activated fire-extinguishing systems and even have other far-reaching applications. Modak proposes, for example, that his bombs could be used for extinguishing oil-slick fires on water, for home and building fire-extinguishers, and even for acid rain control. Further information may be obtained from: Dipl.-Ing. Malay Modak, Dankelmannstrasse 35, 1000 Berlin 19, West Germany, Tel. 322 46 06.

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### Henderson Island Saved

Some months back (*Environmental Conservation*, 10(2), pp. 171-3, 1983) we called attention to a serious threat to Henderson Island, the last remaining essentially pristine elevated coral atoll in the oceanic Pacific. A wealthy American strip-miner had asked the British Government for permission to build a home, landing facilities, and an airstrip, on this small uninhabited island near Pitcairn, of Bounty mutiny fame. He had offered, as inducement, to build an airstrip on Pitcairn and to give the Pitcairn people \$800,000 'to better their living conditions'. The result of this proposal, if accepted, would have been to destroy both Henderson and Pitcairn as functioning systems, and to sacrifice all future opportunity to study a practically unaltered set of island ecosystems as a baseline for observations on other, changing, islands.

When word of this proposal leaked out, hurried efforts were made to alert such organizations as the Pacific Science Association, the Royal Society of London, the Smithsonian Institution, and various other British and US conservation groups. A

storm of protest resulted, directed to the British Commonwealth Office. Much debate ensued as to the relative values of maintaining intact the one remaining example of an important type of island and of major financial assistance to a small, isolated group of people of great historical and sociological interest. In this connection the question was raised as to whether such outside 'assistance' would not destroy this tiny culture, as such, by breaking down its isolation and absorbing it into the body of Western culture.

The desirability of carrying out an ecological study of Henderson Island, before the threatened change or any alteration took place, was emphasized, and possibilities of funding such an expensive undertaking were discussed, but with little result.

We are now happy to announce that permission to settle on Henderson Island has been denied by the British authorities 'for administrative and environmental reasons'. The threat to the island's integrity has been, at least for now, averted.

Possibilities for at least a limited study of Henderson Island