## Reorganization of Air Force Research Labs Aims to Reduce Staff

The Air Force is reorganizing its scientific research laboratories in the name of cutting costs, and some materials researchers who work for those laboratories could eventually lose their jobs.

On April 8, the Air Force created a new, single Air Force Research Laboratory by merging four major existing laboratories—Armstrong Laboratory at Brooks Air Force Base in Texas; Phillips Laboratory at Kirtland Air Force Base in New Mexico; Rome Laboratory in Rome, New York; and Wright Laboratory at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. Also included was the Air Force's Office of Scientific Research in Washington DC.

Those four labs and the research office all are part of the Air Force Materiel Command, which has the job of developing new weapon systems for the Air Force, including conducting basic and applied research that are required for those weapons.

Not surprisingly, materials research is important at these labs—and likely will be equally important at the unified Research Laboratory. For example, projects at the Phillips Laboratory have sought to develop new materials for use in rockets and spacecraft, while materials research at the Rome Laboratory has included an effort to develop optical materials for use in photonic devices.

Collectively, the Air Force labs employ about 12,000 civilians and 11,000 military personnel. For now, the four labs and the research office continue to operate as they had, with little having changed except that, at the top of the organizational chart, they now are all headed by a single individual, Major General Richard Paul, commander of the new lab. They are somewhat like different campuses of a single university.

By this fall, Paul will try to devise a new organizational structure for the lab that will try to squeeze major savings out of its $1.2 billion budget. The commander will try to cut out waste and duplication, particularly in management. "The result is a streamlined laboratory structure that better meets the needs of the warfighter commands and our other... customers," Paul said.

"The goal is to allow us to reduce the amount of overhead involved with research," said David Levingston, a spokesperson for Air Force Materiel Command. He said that there will not be sweeping changes among scientists. "There are no plans at this time to move anybody anywhere. There are no plans to close a laboratory," Levingston said.

But although most of the savings from the new Research Laboratory are expected to come from reducing duplication in management, Paul will also be looking for scientific programs and facilities that are duplicated at more than one of the "campuses" of the Research Laboratory and that therefore can be cut. "You won't have two laboratories doing the same research," Levingston said.

Congress has already ordered the Air Force to reduce the staff of its laboratories by 35% by 2001. That is part of a demand by Congress that the entire Pentagon reduce the number of separate laboratories and testing centers that it operates.

VINCENT KIERNAN

## NSF to Adopt New Merit Review Criteria

The National Science Board (NSB) has approved new criteria for evaluating funding proposals submitted to the National Science Foundation (NSF). The Board, which is the governing body of NSF, took the action at its March 28 meeting. NSF expects to implement the new criteria beginning October 1, 1997.

Currently the agency asks reviewers to comment on four aspects of a proposal: (1) researcher performance competence; (2) intrinsic merit of the research; (3) utility or relevance of the research; and (4) effect on the infrastructure of science and engineering.

Under the new criteria, reviewers are asked to answer two questions regarding proposals for funding: (1) What is the intellectual merit and quality of the proposed activity? and (2) What are the broader impacts of the proposed activity?

The approval culminates several months of discussion with the research and education community and analysis by a special task force, chaired by NSB member Warren Washington of the National Center for Atmospheric Research. Hundreds of scientists, engineers, and educators offered both support and critique, as well as specific suggestions. Many of those suggestions are incorporated into the guidance that will accompany the new criteria.

"We know from surveys of our reviewers and staff that the current criteria are not always well-understood or uniformly applied," said NSF Acting Deputy Director Joe Bordogna. "The new criteria are clearer and easier to apply."

The need to reexamine the current criteria was prompted by an evolution in NSF programs since 1981 to include a stronger focus on broad educational initiatives, the integration of research and education, and partnered research activities. It was also prompted by the adoption in 1994 of a new NSF strategic plan.

"The new criteria can be applied more flexibly to this broad range of activities; and they better reflect the philosophy and spirit of our strategic plan," said Bordogna.

NSF receives nearly 30,000 new proposals for funding per year, and funds about one-third of them. Funding decisions are made largely through the process of merit review, including expert evaluation by selected peers. NSF receives more than 170,000 such reviews each year to help evaluate funding proposals.

For more information on the Merit Review Task Force Final Report, contact The National Science Foundation, 4201 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, Virginia 22230; 703-306-1234; TDD: 703-306-0090.

## Report Highlights DOE's Privatization Efforts

The Department of Energy (DOE) issued a report that analyzes the department's efforts to privatize departmental functions. The report entitled "Harnessing the Market: The Opportunities and Challenges of Privatization" includes 13 case studies that explore actual DOE privatization efforts over the past two years. Among the case studies are Privatization of Hanford Tank Waste Remediation System and Precious Metals Sales.

The Privatization Working Group was established in late 1995 by former Secretary Hazel O'Leary to examine how privatization could assist the department in improving productivity and cutting costs. The report analyzes key issues surrounding the three types of DOE privatization: divestiture of functions, contracting out, and asset transfers. Issues raised by DOE privatization proposals include for example, environment, safety and health responsibilities, and institutional competencies. The report also describes key legal authorities that govern each type of privatization effort, makes a series of recommendations, and outlines accompanying actions that will help the department take advantage of the opportunities and confront the challenges of privatization.

The report can be ordered from the Public Inquiries Office, U.S. Department of Energy, Forrestal Building, 1000 Independence Ave., SW, Room 1E-206, Washington, DC 20585; 202-586-5575; and is available on the Internet at http://www.doe.gov/privatization/report/. □



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