Technology Notes

PUBLIC POLICY

Senate Patent Lineup

The Senate Subcommittee on Patents remains unchanged in the newly organized Congress. This year's fight over who owns inventions should be a replay of last year's deadlock.

Senator John L. McClellan (D-Ark.) continues as chairman, and is expected to reintroduce his measure to allow Federal agencies to waive to contractors rights on patents arising from federally-backed research. Of the remaining members, Senator Hugh Scott (R-Pa.) is expected to back the bill, while Senators Philip A. Hart (D-Mich.) and Quentin N. Burdick (D-N. Dak.) oppose it. Senator Hiram L. Fong (R-Hawaii) is believed ready to cast the deciding vote sending the bill to the full committee principally to move it to full Senate consideration; he won't commit himself to backing it.

That was the subcommittee lineup that approved the bill last year; it finally died on the Senate floor in the face of a threatened filibuster.

AIR WARFARE

Choppers Get Smoke Screens

The U.S. Army's UH-1 helicopters, the Hueys, are about to start spreading smoke screens in Vietnam.

About 20 prototype smoke generators are being shipped to southeast Asia, each capable of laying a 1,000-yard curtain of smoke that will last two minutes in "moderate" winds.

One test model, developed at the Army's Limited War Laboratory in Natick, Mass., has already successfully screened the airlifting of a damaged UH-1D by a CH-47 helicopter in Vietnam.

OCEANOGRAPHY

German Undersea Laboratory

About 300 feet beneath the surface of the North Sea, West Germany plans to anchor an underwater laboratory for studies of weightlessness and investigations of new food sources in the sea.

The 8-by-28-foot station will weigh some 20 tons and be designed to withstand severe storms. It is to be operated jointly by the Helgoland Biological Station and the Experimental Station for Air and Space Research.

CONSERVATION

Radio To Track Flying Foxes

Very high frequency radio is the latest weapon in the battle to rid orchards in New South Wales, Australia, of flying foxes, which have caused heavy crop losses in recent years.

When the foxes make their first raid, some will be captured, and miniature VHF transmitters will be attached to them. Experts from the Radio Institute of Australia, Sydney, will then attempt to track them to their home base.

"Once a base is located, it is relatively easy to destroy the flying foxes," one area orchardist said, "but finding it has been almost impossible."

ATOMIC POWER

Ontario's First Nuclear Electricity

Canada's first full-scale nuclear power generating plant began providing electricity to Ontario province in January. Output of the station is 200,000 kilowatts.

The $85 million installation at Douglas Point, on the shore of Lake Huron, first began test operation in November. After its present trial period as part of Ontario's power network, the station will become a base load plant on the province's eastern power system.

MARINE TECHNOLOGY

Plastic Bag Repels Sharks

Men overboard in shark infested waters can be protected from attack by a large plastic bag that screens their presence from the sharks, Navy researchers have found.

The five-foot-long bag is filled with water and supported at its open upper end by an inflatable ring. The man, supported by a life jacket, floats inside, effectively out of sight of cruising sharks.

Blood from wounds or other clues in the water to a man's presence are also contained by the bag, according to Dr. C. Scott Johnson of the Navy Ordnance Test Station's Marine Biology Facility, Point Mugu, Calif.

Tests have shown that several types of sharks ignore the man-concealing bag in the water. Some even went out of their way to avoid the strange object floating near them.

The Office of Naval Research is preparing to recommend adoption of the repellent device by the fleet.

DESALINATION

Desalting the Desalting Plants

Fresh water output of the seawater desalting plant at Eilat, Israel, went up 25% after introduction of a technique using hot sulfuric acid to control buildup of calcium carbonate scale.

The acid process was developed by the plant's builder, the Baldwin-Lima-Hamilton Corp., of Eddystone, Pa. It enabled the Eilat plant to raise output from a million gallons a day to 1.25 million. The increase dropped water prices in Eilat from $1.38 to $1.25 a thousand gallons according to the Jan. 23 Chemical and Engineering News magazine.

OCEANOGRAPHY

Fresh Air From Seawater

Stale air in submarines or undersea shelters may soon be oxygenated and cleaned of noxious gases in a seawater exchange unit demonstrated at the Navy's Civil Engineering Laboratory in Port Hueneme, Calif.

The stale air is forced into an exchange tank containing continuously circulating seawater. There it picks up oxygen and nitrogen from the water while carbon dioxide and other toxic gases are removed, all in a single operation.

Dr. Harold P. Vind, inventor of the device, points out that conventional submarine oxygen generators require supplementary devices to supply nitrogen and cleanse the air.

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