

may prove to be a valuable partner for any groups seriously working to reduce health hazards in industry.

Liaison with the Trades Union involved is of paramount importance. For it is they who have experience of negotiating with management and they who have at their disposal, the services of the independent Centenary Institute of Occupational Health which specialises in the chemical analysis and medical evaluation of questionable materials.

● Remember that your main reason for being on the 'shop' floor is to exchange information and experience. The people on the shop floor can give you first hand knowledge of the processes they work with and the hazards that these processes involve. They can tell you how their plant/office actually works, not just how it is supposed to work. For your part you can help these men and women to understand the technical/medical explanation of the hazard and how to monitor and keep

the necessary records of the hazard.

● Unfortunately, even the introduction of reasonable health conditions is an issue which often involves conflicts with employers. Recently 5,000 men and women at the Shell/Chevron plant in California had to strike for 5 months just to have seven medical provisions written into their contract. This was done in the light of the fact that all the other major petrochemical companies in the United States had already agreed to medical provisions being written into their contracts. The scientist must be prepared to stand up in defence of working people. This may mean pressing their case in joint management/union committees or even standing up in court to put the facts as they see them. Two men in the United States, Dr Selikoff of Mount Sinai Hospital in New York and Dr Epstein, have actually done this.

● Be prepared to use the press and television to publicise your case. The BSSRS helped World in Action to do

the first exposé of the VCM problem in this country. Later we devoted 15 minutes of an Open Door programme (BBC2) to a discussion of the VCM issue.

● In cooperation with other scientific, production line, and office workers, press for the implementation by the government, management and trade unions of systematic pre-testing of industrial processes and materials for possible health hazards.

Clearly it is not enough for individual scientists to become involved in isolated local health hazard issues. There must be a coordinated body for scientists participating in the field of occupational health. This is precisely the role that the BSSRS has begun to play and hopes to develop systematically and comprehensively in the future. We cannot afford to finance teams of investigation or the much needed thorough long term research in this area. We hope, however, to be able to serve as a vital catalysing agent.

international news

MINISTERS from 24 countries, including Britain's Denis Howell, met in Paris last week at the first meeting of Environment Ministers convened by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The ministers met to discuss several recommendations put forward by the environment group of the OECD on the formulation of rational and coherent environment policies throughout the OECD countries.

One of the concepts discussed at the recent meeting was in fact accepted in outline in 1972, namely the 'Polluter Pays Principle', which in effect means limiting state aid for pollution control to industry while making it conform to certain standards. This will then mean that goods made by polluting industry will be more expensive, as they have to pay for their own pollution control. The consumer, it is argued, will therefore prefer the cheaper goods made by non-polluting industry. Some countries have already incorporated the principle in their legislation, although, exceptionally, state aid may be allowed.

The ministers also discussed the OECD's proposed code of conduct for dealing with the problem of trans-frontier pollution. One of the main points of the code is that pollution exported to other countries must not exceed the levels permitted within the polluting country.

The most widely discussed instance

OECD urges environment policies

by Eleanor Lawrence

of this type of pollution, as far as Britain is concerned, is the sulphur dioxide from Britain and from continental Europe which ends up over Scandinavia as acid rain, with dire environmental consequences. The OECD is at present in the middle of an international survey of air pollution—the first such survey to use completely standardised monitoring methods—which should clarify this situation. Commenting after the meeting, Mr Howell said that Britain might have to reconsider her power-generating policy if the results of the survey showed that sulphur dioxide emissions from power stations were the 'culprit'.

The problem of trans-frontier pollution also raises the question of whether people affected have the same rights in the polluting countries' courts as would citizens of those countries in the same situation. But unfortunately, even the citizens of some countries find it extremely difficult to gain standing on matters of pollution in the courts, so that this might prove to be an empty privilege.

Complications and inequalities could also arise because of the fundamental difference between the judicial structures in the various countries—Europe by and large follows Roman law whereas in Britain there is the added complication of being able to bring prosecutions under common law, which operates on a precedent system rather than on the basis of published statutes.

There is also the problem of who exactly is liable to prosecution. If treaties for lower pollution had actually been signed between polluted and polluting countries, the defendant might well be the Government in the person of the Secretary of State for the Environment. Other problems would, of course, be the usual ones which bedevil pollution legislation generally, such as collecting sufficient data to make a case which will be accepted in the courts in the first place.

At present, if an article manufactured in Britain is sent abroad and proves to be harmful, it may well be the distributors in that country who are prosecuted and not the manufacturing company. This has happened in Australia in the case of thalidomide, marketed there by a subsidiary of Distillers Company Ltd.

The effects of pollution will be far less easy to define in practice than even the effects of a manufactured article, and there is the prospect of a real field day for the lawyers. □