

Inexhaustible energy supply?

Laser fusion gets federal boost

Laser fusion is not a high-priority item in the national energy plan, but it has Rep. Carl Pursell's (R-Plymouth) wholehearted support.

Pursell, says, could "help to free the United States from its risky wager on foreign energy sources."

Pursell and the rest of the House Science and Technology Committee recently approved an \$8.8 million increase in the 1979 fiscal year energy budget. The Carter Administration had recommended that the fusion budget be cut by \$3 million, from \$129 million to \$126 million.

"Congress recognizes the vast potential of fusion energy, and is not willing to accept a funding cut in a program vital to our energy supply. Cutting back on energy research at this precarious moment would be unbelievable folly," Pursell said.

A MAJOR beneficiary of the proposed increase in the fusion program is KMS Fusion of Ann Arbor, the leading industrial participant in the fusion program. Of the \$8.8 million increase, \$3.8 million is earmarked for research and development at KMS Fusion.

It was KMS Fusion which whetted Pursell's interest in laser fusion.

LASER FUSION, until recently, was considered the private property of the Pentagon. It has now been recognized as a potentially inexhaustible energy source.

The highly technical process forces two hydrogen isotopes together until the particles fuse. The fusion produces a vast amount of heat which can be used to make steam and generate electricity.

It is considered an "inexhaustible" energy form because the necessary hydrogen could be derived from water molecules.

Fusion, joining particles together, is different from fission. Fission also yields large amounts of energy but requires splitting apart such elements as uranium and plutonium.

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT of energy has predicted that an electrical generating plant using the laser fusion process could be built by the year 2010. It estimated such a plant could produce enough electricity to power a metropolitan area the size of San Francisco.

According to reports from Washington, D.C., military lobbying has been the major factor keeping laser fusion from becoming a legitimate source of energy for mass consumption.

"Almost anyone you talk to expresses a fear that the fusion process will be taken out of the government labs," said Diane Brago, an aide to Pursell.

"There's a very close parallel between the military and civilian approaches to fusion. Right now, there's a great problem with industry being able to get the right information," she said.

Wayne County suffering through measles outbreak

The Wayne County Health Department has warned of an increasing number of measles cases in county schools. While the increase is not an epidemic, local health officials are concerned it could become one, because most measles cases usually occur during the spring. If this pattern continues, there could be a sharp increase in the number of measles cases within the next several weeks.

According to Dr. Jane Polkowski, director of communicable disease control for the health department, 75 cases of measles have been reported for the same period. The median number of cases for the past five years has been 56 cases for this period.

Though the disease is thought by some to be a harmless childhood ailment, Dr. Polkowski noted that most people become very ill when they get it.

In addition to the characteristic measles rash, symptoms include high fever (102 degrees F or above), cough, inflammation and runniness of the eyes and nose.

The symptoms usually last eight to 10 days but serious complications such as pneumonia and encephalitis may occur. Encephalitis may result in convulsions, mental retardation or deafness. About one in 10,000 children with measles die from the disease.

Dr. Polkowski noted that the disease and its complications can be prevented through immunization, and that most outbreaks involve unvaccinated or improperly vaccinated children.

Immunization against measles is recommended according to those who have not received it, received it before 12 months of age, received the inactivated vaccine (available before 1966), or received the further attenuated live virus vaccine with immune serum globulin.

The vaccine is available from physicians or from the free health department clinics. Clinic locations and hours are Wayne County Health Center, Merriman Road (one block north of Michigan Avenue, next to Wayne County General Hospital, 274-2800, ext. 310, 8:30-11:30 a.m. and 1:30-3 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 12:30-3 p.m. Wednesday; Taylor South Health Center, 21201 Eureka, 287-2400, 4:30-7:30 p.m., Tuesday and 8:30-11:30 a.m. Friday.



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