

Panel scrutinizes A&M use of genetically altered virus

DALLAS (AP) — Texas researchers who used a vaccine containing a genetically altered virus on pigs will have their action scrutinized by a special committee later this month.

The panel of scientists, appointed by the National Institutes of Health, will decide whether researchers at Texas A&M University violated federal rules involving genetic alteration.

The vaccine in question was used on 1,400 pigs on a Lometa, Texas, farm two years ago under the direction of the Texas Animal Health Commission and researchers at Texas A&M.

The vaccine was developed by removing a gene from the virus that causes a form of herpes that affects one in 10 pigs.

Sale of the vaccine was halted last month by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to assess its environmental impact.

Sales resumed after a review. The USDA action was prompted by concerns raised by Jeremy Rifkin, president of an organization seeking stricter government control of genetically engineered organisms.

Rifkin, of the Washington-based Foundation on Economic Trends, said he objected to licensing the vaccine because it had not been reviewed by the Agriculture Department's Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee.

Rifkin said he then learned that animal tests of the vaccine hadn't been reviewed by the counterpart committee at the Na-

tional Institutes of Health.

Federally funded researchers, before beginning field tests of a recombinant DNA product, must submit their plans to the NIH, which decides whether to approve the tests.

Texas A&M's Institutional Biosafety Committee, after publicity about Rifkin's initial objections to the vaccine licensing, submitted a "report of a potential violation" to NIH, said Dr. Bernard Talbot, adviser to the NIH Recombinant DNA Committee.

Saul Kit, head of biochemical virology at the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, who developed the vaccine, contends the vaccine didn't need NIH approval because it wasn't created with recombinant DNA.

Railway cars carrying acid derailed

TULIA, Texas (AP) — Four tanker cars carrying sulfuric acid derailed Monday near this Panhandle town when a freight train of the Santa Fe Railway Co. hit an empty tank car, a company spokesman says.

Crew members on the train suffered only bumps and bruises in the collision about 60 miles southwest of Amarillo, said Robert Gehrt, director of public relations for the Santa Fe Railway in Chicago.

Initially, Gehrt had said the empty

car may have been moved in front of the train by vandals. But FBI officials say railway spokesmen said it was an accident.

FBI spokesman U.H. Specht said, "The railroad's saying it's accidental. We have to go pretty much with what the railroad tells us."

Company spokesman Richard Hall said, "We are not directly blaming that incident on vandalism." He added that high winds may have

pushed the empty car onto

line. Gehrt said that the tank car by the freight train had been with potentially explosive ammonia before being derailed over the weekend.

James Hart, dispatcher for Tulia police department, said cleanup crews managed to contain the acid that had run into a bed and that no evacuation was necessary.

Oil predicted to stabilize at \$20 per barrel

HOUSTON (AP) — Oil prices should stabilize at about \$20 a barrel by the end of the year, but continued low prices could mean doom for many energy-related companies, Pennzoil Co. President Richard J. Howe predicted Monday.

"I seriously hope our forecasts are too bearish, but only time will tell,"

he said at a news conference at the annual Offshore Technology Conference.

Crude oil prices were less than \$15 per barrel Monday, up from even lower \$12 levels of a few weeks ago but well off the \$28-per-barrel range at this time last year.

"I think it's obvious the longer it

stays at this low level the more

difficult it is going to be," Howe

don't think anybody would venture a guess on how many companies would go to the boards. But if it (the price) goes into the low teens again there, there will be a lot of companies leaving or not surviving

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