



PLASTIC PERIL
 Mouse study suggests
 bisphenol A could
 raise risk of breast
 cancer.

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IMAGE
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 REASONS

Animal Quarantine Institute, says that the Qinghai cases are probably isolated. He adds that China has more than 450 surveillance sites looking for the virus in various animals, including migratory birds. But one source says staff at the sites lack the necessary resources and training, and are likely to be missing cases. The surveillance stations in Qinghai, the source says, have machines for diagnosing samples, but people there don't know how to use them, and don't have the necessary reagents. ■

David Cyranoski

received written confirmation from the Chinese Ministry of Health. "The WHO does not have any reason to believe that the ministry's report is not true," he adds.

An editor at Boxun says he reported the human cases in the hope that it would force an investigation. "I feel that something serious has happened. It is worth people paying attention to what is going on there," he says. "Remember, SARS happened in big cities, and China kept it secret for a few months. In a remote area, it is even more difficult to get the truth out."

Declan Butler

UK research councils claim success for open-access publishing plan

LONDON

Britain's main public funders for research seem to have achieved the impossible — they've come up with a policy that pleases both sides in the debate over open-access publishing. But appearances can be deceptive. Behind public praise for the statement, some publishers are voicing fears that small journals will go out of business, which could put scientific societies at risk.

Opponents of the current system of scientific publishing have lobbied hard in recent years, calling for all publicly funded research to be made available in free-to-access journals or archives. Their campaign, which in the United States included television adverts, has worried academic publishers. The fear is that libraries will cancel their subscriptions if papers are made available for free.

Supporters of open access are claiming victory in the wake of rules drawn up by Britain's research councils, which distribute most government science funding. The policy has delighted them because it requires all council-funded papers be put in an open-access archive "as soon as possible" after publication. Other major funders of research around the globe, including the US National Institutes of Health (NIH), allow researchers to wait up to a year before depositing their work.

Stevan Harnad, an advocate of open access and a cognitive scientist at the University of Southampton, believes that the UK policy's insistence on submission will make the use of open-access archives a regular part of academic life. "Once the history of this is written, this statement will be the single most important factor," he says.

But a crucial change to the policy, made following complaints from publishers, could dilute the power of archives. After consulting on an initial draft issued last autumn, the councils changed the policy so that submissions to archives will be subject to the copyright and licensing arrangement of the journal publishing the paper. Publishing executives say privately that they can now rewrite their rules so that submission takes place after a delay of several months, which will

The UK policy

Scientists will submit papers to subject-specific archives or to an equivalent run by their institution. The paper would only be the final text document accepted for publication, not the formatted version that is printed.

If this causes a range of archives to proliferate, access to papers should still be straightforward. Scholarly search engines, such as that unveiled last year by Google, automatically look through institutional repositories, so users shouldn't need to know where an article is actually held.

protect their subscription revenues.

Commercial journals are happy with the policy, but other publishers remain fearful. Learned societies, for example, often fund activities such as fellowship schemes through publishing. They say that libraries are strapped for cash and will consider cancelling subscriptions once archives take off, especially for journals that publish only a few times a year.

"We simply don't know how much damage this will do," says Sally Morris, chief executive of the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers, based in West Sussex. "If other funders follow this route, much material will be made available for free. Why would you pay?"

Harnad says there is no need to worry, as fields in which archiving is common, such as computer science and physics, show no evidence of failing journals.

The Wellcome Trust, Britain's biggest medical charity, is even more bullish about the idea. It said on 19 May that all papers produced using its money will have to be submitted to the NIH archive PubMed Central or to the British equivalent that is being developed. "Old journals sometimes cease to publish, but new ones spring up," says Mark Walport, the trust's director. "I have some sympathy with the learned societies, but it is not the primary mission of funders to support them."

The councils' statement still has to be "fine-tuned", say officials. Originally due for release this month, it has been put back until the summer, but is not expected to undergo significant changes before then. ■
 Jim Giles