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News

US imports tested for GM

The EU has decided that all long grain rice imports from the US must be tested for illegal GM material before entering Europe. But Friends of the Earth's Clare Oxborrow believes that products already on shop shelves could be contaminated and should be tested.

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News

National nuclear lab for UK

The UK government plans to establish a national nuclear laboratory, by joining the British Technology Centre at Sellafield and Nexia Solutions, the research company owned by British Nuclear Fuels. The new lab will support the UK's R&D requirements, and operate world-class facilities.

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News

Prices to soar again

By Patrick Walter

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The UK chemical industry looks set to face a tough winter as natural gas prices are expected to overtake last year's record highs. The expected increase in gas prices will come despite current low prices. Some UK suppliers recently paid to get rid of excess gas. The current glut is expected to be very short term, however.

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Fakes threaten food safety

By Cath O'Driscoll

Trade in counterfeit plant protection products is booming in Europe, potentially endangering food safety and human health, unless action is taken, according to experts.

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Flu vaccine shortage

If a flu pandemic were to occur today, the potential vaccine supply would fall several billion doses short for the global population. Bridging the gap between vaccine demand and supply in the event of a pandemic should involve three main approaches: increase in seasonal vaccine use, increase in vaccine production capacity and further R&D for more effective vaccines, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

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Act now on climate or else

Unabated climate change could reduce the global economy by a fifth, according to the most comprehensive review ever carried out on the economics of climate change.

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Nation lacks innovation

While over 70% of the UK public believe innovation is the best way to solve economic and social problems, they do not think that the UK is innovative enough, according to a Mori poll commissioned by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA).

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CSB damns safety record

By Neil Eisberg

BP has refused to be drawn on the damning report from the US Chemical Safety Board (CSB) that the company had knowledge, possibly for years, of significant safety problems at its Texas City refinery and up to 34 other facilities worldwide.

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Cambrex trims health business

By Neil Eisberg

US diversified life sciences company Cambrex (East Rutherford, New Jersey) is divesting two non-strategic operations in its human health business to a holding company controlled by International Chemical Investors and two bioproducts businesses to Switzerland-based Lonza.

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CHP to enjoy renaissance in the UK

By Marina Murphy

Conoco Phillips has announced a £210m (\$400m) expansion of its Humberside, UK, combined heat and power (CHP) plant. At the same time, N-power Cogen plans to invest £100m in its CHP business in the UK over the next five years.

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Anti-viral could pollute water supply

By Anthony King

A new study suggests the anti-viral Tamiflu could pose significant ecotoxicological risks in the event of a flu pandemic, and highlights a legacy of inadequate environmental testing of pharmaceutical products.

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Polymers given vitamin C boost

By Patrick Walter

Adding vitamin C to certain hi-tech polymerisation reactions can reduce the amount of catalyst required a thousandfold.

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Now you see me, now you don't

By Patrick Walter

The possibility of invisibility took a step towards reality with the announcement that scientists have managed to build a prototype of a cloaking device capable of hiding objects from microwaves (Science, doi: 10.1126/science.1133628)

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Gordon E Moore and Perkin medal winners announced

The 2006 SCI Gordon E Moore and Perkin medals were awarded by SCI America Group at the SCI/Chemical Heritage Foundation meeting in Philadelphia, in September.

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Mouse mimics humans

By Patrick Walter

A new type of lab mouse, which responds to viral infections in a similar way to people, could provide a more realistic model for studying human disease.

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News

A sweeter treatment for epilepsy

By Patrick Walter

A tumour-imaging agent could form the basis of a new treatment for epilepsy.

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News

Drug trial was flawed

*The ill-fated trial of the monoclonal antibody drug TGN1412 should never have gone ahead as vital information was not presented to the regulators, according to Dutch scientists (The Lancet 2006, **368**, 1387).*

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News

Face transplant gets ok

A UK surgeon has been given permission to carry out the world's first full face transplant. Peter Butler at London's Royal Free Hospital will carry out the operation.

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News

Four die after flu vaccine

Israel's health ministry has reportedly stopped giving seasonal flu vaccines, after four people died following inoculation with a vaccine manufactured by Sanofi-Aventis.

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News

Ex-FDA chief pleads guilty

Former US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) commissioner Lester Crawford has pleaded guilty to criminal violations stemming from his failure to tell government ethics officers that he owned significant stock in companies regulated by the FDA, according to the Los Angeles Times.

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News

Ineos ups output in Europe

Ineos Enterprises (Runcorn, Cheshire, UK) is to build at least 2m t/year capacity of biodiesel production across Europe by 2012, with 1.2m t/year by 2010, beginning with a €90m (\$115m) 500 000t/year plant at Grangemouth.

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News

Thailand's palm oil plans

Thai plans to pursue the development of palm oil for biodiesel production have been scrapped, the new Thai energy minister told the Reuters newsagency. The focus for renewables will shift to power generation.

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News

Fuel from wood waste

Bioethanol Japan Kansai, a joint venture between Marubeni and Daiei Inter Nature System, Taisei and other Japanese companies, is scheduled to complete a plant in Sakai City, Osaka, that will use waste wood from the construction sector to produce ethanol for fuel.

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News

Fake cow fools carriers

By Jennifer Rohn

A system that uses synthetic cow-hide to measure tick mortality could replace live animals in tests used to evaluate pesticides.

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News

Model tracks electron pairs

By Marina Murphy

US scientists have developed a method for accurately predicting electron behaviour in atoms and molecules and therefore the likely course of any reaction between them.

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News

Scientists' heavy discovery

A new super-heavy element - element 118 - has been discovered by scientists in the US and Russia. In experiments conducted at the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research in Russia, three atoms of 118 were produced when a californium ion was bombarded with calcium ions.

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News

Tagging trial could see RFID market soar

By Patrick Walter

A passenger-tagging trial to be conducted in Debrecen airport in Hungary, at the end of this year, could, if successful, see airports all over the world tagging and monitoring passengers using radio frequency identity (RFID) tags. Volunteers at Debrecen will wear RFID tags around their necks and a computer system will constantly track them to within 1 metre.

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News

Europe's first biorefinery opens in Italy

By Jennifer Rohn

Europe's first biorefinery has opened in Terni, Italy. The plant, a joint venture between Novamont, Europe's biggest producer of bioplastics and Colderetti, the Italian Farmer's Association, will use local agricultural products to create bioplastics.

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News

China cools off

By Sean Milmo

China's government wants to become more energy efficient. It hopes to reduce the country's dependence on imported oil, while reducing energy consumption in buildings through more effective insulation.

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Business

Business Digest

By Neil Eisberg

Bayer MaterialScience (Leverkusen, Germany) is acquiring **Ure-Tech**, the Taiwanese thermoplastic polyurethane producer (TPU). Ure-Tech is the largest TPU producer in the Asia-Pacific region, with production sites in Taichung, Taiwan and Shenzhen, China.

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Patents

The honeycomb effect

Shoemakers have found inspiration in a beehive for a sole that cushions the foot when running.

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Patents

Targeting tumours

A novel method of delivering cancer treatments has been developed by extracting antibodies from patients with autoimmune disorders.

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Patents

A healthy vibe

Kidney stones can now be tackled without surgery and can even be destroyed by listening to music with the bass turned up. Roger Talish of US company Juvent has developed a system of transferring vibrational energy to a patient to treat several conditions that affect internal organs.

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Patents

Mobile colour detector

Scientists have turned a mobile phone into an artificial eye that lets colour blind people distinguish between different colours: Tenebraex in the US has developed plans for software that enables an ordinary camera mobile phone to display which colour is which.

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Comment

Benjamin Franklin got it right after all

By Neil Eisberg

More taxes seem to be the current UK government's answer to everything, and the latest leaked proposals from the environment minister, David Milliband, reinforce that view. His answer to the Stern Report on climate change is to penalise everyone for having to use power, rather than helping us to reduce our respective carbon footprints by using new technologies that, for the most part, are currently beyond our financial means.

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Features

Sand banks

By Jon Evans

The past two years have been tough on the motorist, with oil prices at over \$50/barrel for much of the time and peaking at just over \$78/barrel in July. Although they have since slipped back to around \$60/barrel, filling up the car can still be painful.

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Features

Whistling in the wind?

By Elisabeth Jeffries

It is becoming a familiar story: this summer, a council in Essex, UK, rejected a planned onshore wind farm at Bradwell-on-Sea due to the effect on bird populations, airport interference and its proximity to a historic local chapel. The wind farm was to consist of 10 turbines and meet the average annual electricity needs of between 8100 and 10 600 homes.

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Features

All together now

By Sean Milmo

European Union officials have been trying to thrash out an agreement on the funding and procedural rules for the EU's next round of R&D projects, called the seventh framework programme (FP7). Differences between the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers on some issues relating to FP7 are so deep that next year's start of the programme could be delayed.

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Highlights

Applied Highlights

By Nigel P Freestone, The University of Northampton

Dissolvable nanowires

Refluxing an organic solvent, *N,N*-dimethylformamide (DMF) containing AgNO_3 , SnCl_2 , dodecylsodium sulphate (SDS) and cetyltrimethylammonium bromide (CTAB) generates water-dissolvable sodium sulphate nanowires (Na_2SO_4) (Y-C Pu, J R Hwu, W-C Su, D-B Shieh, Y Tzeng, C-S Yeh; *J Am Chem Soc* 2006, **128**, 11606).

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Movers & Shakers

Neil Carmichael, former worldwide head of toxicology at Bayer CropScience and director of the research centre in Sophia Antipolis, southern France, has succeeded **Michael Gribble** as secretary general of the European Centre for Ecotoxicity & Toxicology of Chemicals. Carmichael has worked in the toxicology field for companies including French conglomerate Rhone-Poulenc and its successor companies, and Dow Chemical.

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From chemistry to medicine

The structure of a tree is a unique evolutionary solution to a fascinating problem. How can a plant gain the nutrients and energy it needs to survive, and also defend itself from environmental stress, when it can't move around? In order to achieve this, a tree has a branched, or dendritic, architecture, which it uses to maximise its uptake of nutrients and energy from its limited surroundings.

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Dying to clean up the planet

It is clear that human activity has impacted on the earth to produce global changes and that the environment we live in and our health are inextricably linked. The World Health Organisation estimates that 25% of death and disease globally is linked to environmental hazards and of the global population, 355 000 are killed by unintentional poisonings, resulting from excessive exposure to, or inappropriate use of toxic chemicals.

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