## Policies of Federal Materials Facilities to be Examined

Responding to changes surrounding the use of the United States' materials research facilities, the National Research Council's governing board has approved a year-long study to review the guidelines and policies governing those facilities, with the objective of updating and coordinating the federal management structure.

The review, entitled "Developing a Federal Materials Facilities Strategy," will be conducted by a special committee made up of a dozen appointed members from academia and private industry. The study was both requested and will be funded by the agencies most closely involved in the facilities' operations: the National Science Foundation (NSF), Department of Energy (DOE), and National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). In addition, as an acknowledgment of the growing influence of the medical research community in materials research, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will be involved.

The group will meet for the first time in Washington, DC on September 14 and 15 at the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). Its first day's proceedings are open to the public, to be held at the NAS Building, Room 150, 2101 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20418. More public meetings will be held during the year at various locations. According to NRC, the best way for the materials research community to participate in the study is through the various professional organizations. Also, the study's website is set up for direct communications.

NAS has chosen John J. Wise, a chemist retired from Mobil R&D Corporation where he served as Vice President for 44 years, as the committee chair. Wise is a member of the National Academy of Engineering and of NRC.

Staffers at the agencies involved in the review cite the need to establish the most cooperative atmosphere possible at the effort's outset. They acknowledge that the review is a preemptive measure, intended to head off possible future conflicts and turf battles as the facilities operate in an atmosphere of ever-tightening budgets for scientific research.

"This isn't an attempt to make specific recommendations," according to one official. The review will not result in a document similar to last year's report by DOE's Basic Energy Sciences advisory committee, which evaluated U.S. synchrotron facilities and questioned the need to continue funding in a few cases. "That report was more in-depth," the official said. "It was an attempt to give some hard advice in advance of hard choices."

The new review will be much more general. It is supposed to provide "recommendations for interagency cooperation and coordination" of future planning, funding, and operations of neutron beam and high-magnetic-field facilities as well as synchrotrons. The report will focus on the growing diversity of the user community, as well as recognition that "federal agencies that support scientific R&D are under substantial budget pressures that are expected to increase," according to the initial proposal for agency funding that was prepared by NRC staffers last year. The proposal states that those pressures have "made new facility starts difficult and put great pressures on agencies to justify continued operation of existing facilities, especially those that may have overlap in mission or in the communities served."

As a result, NRC concluded that an overall strategy must be put into place to manage the materials facilities. Elements of the strategy would include:

- management and structure of individual facilities ("How might they be altered to address a changing user community and its infrastructure needs?")
- interagency planning and operations for old and new facilities ("What type of collaboration and coordination can be introduced to maximize the return on the available federal investment?")
- decision-making and management ("What changes can be made in the decision-making structure and administrative organization of laboratories and their funding agencies to maximize the benefit to the research community, both academic and industrial, while still meeting agency missions?") and
- international aspects ("How can the growing pressure to take advantage of





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international facilities and to deal with the concomitant negotiating, management, and funding issues be accommodated?")

In this context, NRC has directed the committee to consider changing patterns of use at the materials facilities, as well as the implications for the agencies that support research in the relevant areas of science. The group also must consider ways to achieve the following, broadly stated objectives:

- providing a systematic government-wide approach for exploiting the facilities in a coordinated and efficient manner,
- accounting for the particular roles and responsibilities of the various agencies involved, and
- confronting evolving scientific and technological needs, international changes, and budgetary forces.

In addition, according to the NRC proposal, the committee is supposed to consider ways to "provide effective support for the non-expert user community and effective support by federal agencies of the research teams and individuals that use the facilities." Part of this would be accomplished by identifying ways to educate emerging user communities.

For further information and regular updates of the committee's progress, access website http://www2.nas.edu/bcst/Mf_index.htm.

PHIL BERARDELLI



## NASA's Inspection 98 Offers Tech Information to Boost Private Sector Capabilities

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Johnson Space Center in Houston has scheduled its annual exposition of space technology for October 14–16. Representatives of business, industry, education, and community leaders are invited to participate in the Center's Inspection 98. This will be the third event of its kind. More than 200 exhibits and demonstrations of space-based technology will be offered in 22 facilities during those three days.

George Abbey, the Center's director, said, "At Inspection 98 we will introduce visitors to NASA-developed technologies that can be utilized to solve problems on Earth, and put our guests in touch with the engineers and scientists who are designing [future] missions."

Inspection 98 guests may find applications for the featured technologies in a wide range of industrial, business, and other areas, including information technology, biotechnology, energy, environmental protection and remediation, aerospace, transportation, manufacturing, and education.

The space technologies to be showcased cover a broad range of activities from training to materials testing. Concepts for new generations of space suits are developed and translated into reality at the Center laboratories. Test chambers subject materials and equipment to spacelike vacuum and to heat and cold, vibration, and meteorite-like impacts.

Inspection 98 has no registration fee. Professionals in the fields of business, industry, education, and community affairs may register at the Inspection website, http://inspection.jsc.nasa.gov; or e-mail inspection@jsc.nasa.gov, phone 281-244-1316, or fax 281-483-9193 for more information. Guests may organize their own agenda and attend the event for a half day, full day, or several days. □



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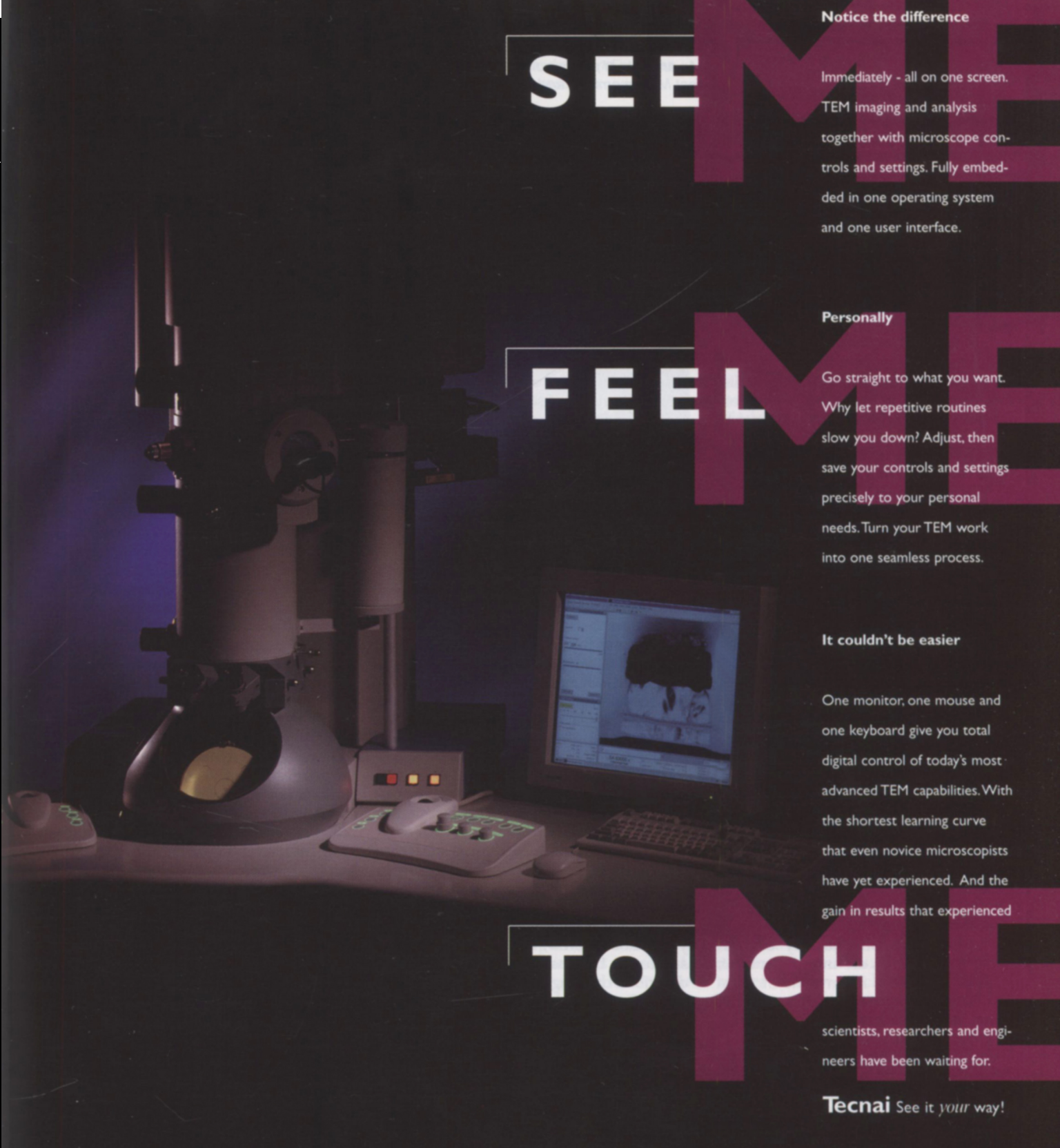


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