

others submitted to HSE in the future. This should open up access for those who are not part of HSC's expert advisory committees, and improve significantly the range and quality of research projects supported.

52. HSE currently contributes to a number of JIP projects, carried out by British Gas Technology (BGT), under which control of the research is in the hands of the sponsors, thus excluding pressure groups and others with a legitimate interest in the research. There is thus a potential conflict between the JIP's operation and HSE's normal practice which is to ensure that the research it sponsors is published. Since the net effect of not publishing may create a perceived industry bias, of operating behind closed doors, HSE's commitment to publication needs to be understood by potential partners.

53. The agreement of a research strategy will enable HSE to take account of any plans for industry-managed safety research (produced by an industry umbrella group) before inviting competing bids for substantial projects from academic institutions, as well as industry research bodies.

#### Recommendation 7

54. *Given the gas industry's present ad hoc arrangements for the collaborative funding of safety research, a new mechanism is required to ensure that an appropriate level of safety-related research will be undertaken, following HSC's advice in 1994/5 that satisfactory voluntary arrangements would be a necessary element of the liberalisation of the gas supply market. There is no gas industry safety research plan at present.*

55. *The present arrangements give no assurance that industry will, in the future, give safety research the priority it deserves. We agree that an HSC advisory committee representing industry, trades unions, and consumers, perhaps chaired by an independent, provides a good route for establishing consensus on a gas safety research programme, along similar lines to the nuclear industry: an industry managed element, with HSC/E capability to place additional contracts where the proposed industry managed element is deficient. That capability should be funded by a levy on gas supplier. A proportion of this levy should also be used to support awareness-raising initiatives related to gas safety; recommendation 11 below addresses this in detail.*

#### **Argument**

56. The gas industry has not yet succeeded in establishing satisfactory voluntary arrangements to ensure the continuation of standards and research formerly undertaken by the British Gas Corporation (BGC), some five years after HSC expressed the view to the then Energy Minister that this would be necessary.

57. Industry's view of what is appropriate and satisfactory is what currently decides the level of research carried out, with small-scale additional projects funded by the taxpayer where budgets allow (given that public research capability spans