

which forces the liquid up the shorter leg and over the bend in the pipe." Hughes was "stunned that there was no mention whatsoever of gravity." Flow in a siphon is driven by the hydrostatic pressure difference due to the greater weight of the liquid in the longer leg. Further searching turned up many dictionaries with the same misconception, and only one, the Oxford Dictionary of English, that had it right, says Hughes. His paper, which aims to set the record straight, was published in *Physics Education* this past spring.

The 99-year-old OED definition reflects "accepted science" from its time, says Alan Hughes, an OED associate editor (not related to the physicist) who deals with scientific terms and maintains that scientists still dispute how a siphon works. A provisional revised definition slated to be published later this year "will just say what [a siphon] is and what it does," he says. A note in smaller type will refer to two possibilities for how a siphon works. "While scientists are disagreeing, I think we shouldn't commit ourselves to one particular method," says Hughes.

"When something gets into the newspapers worldwide," says the OED's Hughes, "we do take note of it. It would be embarrassing to keep the 1911 definition when a number of scientists say it is wrong." The second edition of the OED, published in 1989, is currently being reviewed, he adds. "We are at the end of the letter *r*, having started at *m*." Completing the revision could take another 20 or 30 years. "That's the advantage of having an online version of the dictionary. We publish a further chunk of revised text

every three months." Because of the public interest, he says, "'siphon' will be among the definitions we revise out of sequence."

Toni Feder

news notes

MIT dean is named to head NSF.

Subra Suresh, dean of engineering at MIT since 2007, was nominated by President Obama on 3 June to succeed Arden Bement, who resigned after six years as director of NSF. Suresh led MIT's materials science and engineering department

from 2000 to 2006. During his tenure as dean, in 2009 MIT's engineering department for the first time hired more women than men as new faculty. His research interests include nanotechnology and the life sciences; most recently



Suresh

he has done extensive work on the nanobiomechanical properties of red blood cells. Suresh's appointment is subject to Senate confirmation; at press time, no hearing had been scheduled by the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, which has jurisdiction over NSF. Bement, who was appointed by President George W. Bush, left NSF with a few months remaining on his six-year appointment and returned to Purdue University, where he is setting up a center on science policy.

DK ■

web watch

To suggest topics or sites for Web Watch, please visit <http://www.physicstoday.org/suggestwebwatch.html>. Compiled and edited by Charles Day

<http://www.ostina.org/content/view/4914/1292>

Bridges is an online magazine published by the Office of Science and Technology at Austria's embassy in Washington, DC. Among the articles in the current issue is a report by OST staffer Caroline Adenberger on North Korea's first international university, Pyongyang University of Science and Technology.

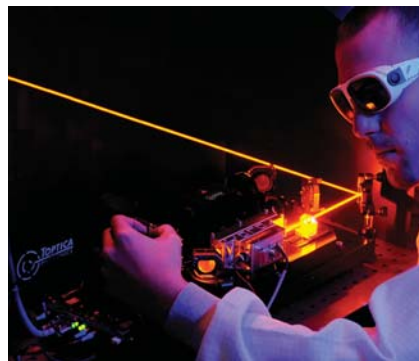


<http://www.nndc.bnl.gov/>

The **National Nuclear Data Center** at Brookhaven National Laboratory provides a clearinghouse for collision cross sections, half-lives, and other nuclear data. The center also maintains a searchable database of papers drawn from 80 journals.

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Therapy/radiation>

Radiation therapy can be as scary to some people as the cancer it's intended to treat. The National Cancer Institute has put together a guide, **Radiation Therapy for Cancer: Questions and Answers**, which explains the various kinds of radiation therapy and how they work.



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