

THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Biosafety Committee

Minutes of the 4th Biosafety Committee Meeting, 15th January 2009, Library, Safety Office, Cheung Yuet Ming Physics Building. 11.00-13.15.

All members of the committee were present:-

	Department	Function/Role
Professor F.C.C. Leung	Zoology	Chairman
Professor G.S.W. Tsao	Anatomy	Medical Faculty Representative
Professor G. Srivastava	Pathology	Medical Faculty Representative
Dr. B.L. Lim	Zoology	Faculty of Science Representative
Dr. K.S. Lo	LAU	CULATR liaison etc.
Ms Cindy Lee	Microbiology	Senior Technical Staff Representative
Professor John Bacon-Shone	Social Sciences	Independent representative
Dr. Mike Mackett	Safety Office	Secretary (Biological Safety Officer)

Dr Edmund Hau the recently appointed Head of Safety was present at the meeting primarily for point 3 on the agenda.

The Chairman started the meeting by welcoming members particularly Professor Bacon-Shone who had joined the committee since its last meeting.

1. Minutes

The committee confirmed the tabled minutes (Appendix A) of the Biosafety Committee Meeting, held on the 20th September 2007, as a true and accurate record.

2. Matters Arising from the Minutes

The Chairman informed the committee that he had agreed with Pro-Vice chancellor Professor Malpas to serve another term as Chairman. He also explained that the committee had did not meet last year partly because of the delay in his reappointment and partly because of the imminent appointment of a new Director of Safety. The new appointees plans would need to be taken into account in any decisions made about the future direction of biosafety in HKU (see minutes on point 3).

It was noted that the points for action had all been dealt with.

3. The future direction of biosafety in HKU.

(a) The new Director of Safety, Dr Edmund Hau gave a verbal briefing on a strategic plan for safety within the University. He noted that several reviews of the University's safety management system had been undertaken and a number of areas identified for improvement. Dr Hau indicated that he had tabled a strategic plan for safety at the

November meeting of the University Safety Health and Environment Committee (SHEC) which was fully endorsed. He indicated that to fully implement the plan new staff resources would be needed particularly for the element of the scheme that involved regular audits of laboratory safety. Another priority area will be training and Dr Hau explained the intention of the Safety Office to develop WEB based self learning packages to assist staff in carrying out their responsibilities.

(b) A wide ranging discussion followed on how biosafety is currently organized and how it might be improved in the future. Dr Lim outlined the features of a scheme he put together (Appendix B).

Other issues arose including:-

(i) UGC grants – the question was asked as to whether anyone monitors or reviews what the applicants record in terms of the safety implications of their work. The current system involves a declaration from the PI/applicant that the issues have been dealt with.

Currently there is no requirement for the safety office to see or approve grant applications.

(ii) It was noted that one of the functions of the Safety Office is to raise awareness of safety issues. This includes provision of information, training, talks, safety circulars etc. It was felt that an area that would benefit from some attention is how the issues of Safety (and Biosafety) are communicated with the University staff as a whole.

(iii) It was acknowledged that the departmental safety officer (DSO) was central to any efforts made to manage safety. The Head of Safety's strategic plan recognizes this and will attempt to re-invigorate the position. The DSO is the natural contact person with a department and the likely repository for documentation as well as an important route for disseminating publicity and information.

(iv) Training – It was pointed out that biosafety issues can not be covered adequately in the short introductory sessions currently given to Research Postgraduate Students, primarily due to the large amount of detail associated with some issues. It was suggested that a formal course similar in nature to that already carried out for training in radioactivity should be established for all those that will handle infectious agents. It was suggested that this could be established either at the Faculty level or through Graduate House.

(c) A short list of 5 further guidance/policy documents to be developed was noted (Attached to the end of Appendix B). The secretary indicated that he would write them as time allowed and circulate them round members for comment before formal approval at a committee meeting.

For Action: - (1) The Biological Safety Officer to investigate the possibility of developing a detailed Biosafety course similar in nature to that already carried out for training in handling radioactivity. (2) As time allows Biosafety Officer to develop further guidance.

4. Quarantine and Prevention of Disease Regulations 2008. (Appendix C).

The secretary summarized the basic requirements of this legislation and indicated that if the committee agreed he would draft a letter to the Department of Health on their behalf

asking for clarification on a number of issues. He would circulate this to members for discussion and approval before getting the Chairman's signature and sending it to the relevant department.

The secretary asked the members whether they had seen the publicity the Safety Office gave to this issue (e-mail and posting on the University portal). It was clear from the response that not everyone had seen the information and those that had did not look at it in detail. This underlined some of the issues about raising awareness that were made in the discussion on the future direction of biosafety (agenda point 3)

For Action: - Secretary to write draft of letter for clarification and circulate to members for comment and approval before sending to the Department of Health

5. Implementation of the Cartagena protocol in Hong Kong.

The secretary introduced Appendix D, a report on a public consultation meeting held by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department on Tuesday 16th December. He indicated that a substantial part of the discussion at the meeting had been on the detail of the licensing arrangements and concerns that were expressed regarding delays this might incur on the importation process. Dr Lo who was also at the meeting agreed and there were no further comments.

For Action:- Secretary to keep the committee informed of progress in this area.

6. Code of Practice for use of the toxic chemical MPTP in the Laboratory Animal Unit.

The Code of Practice submitted to the committee as Appendix E was approved by the committee without comment on the detail.

For Action: - Secretary to circulate to interested parties and arrange for it to be placed on the Safety Office website.

7. Guidance on work in Hong Kong University with virus vectors.

Appendices F-H giving guidance on work with Adenoviruses, Retroviruses and Poxviruses respectively were approved. Several members commented on the documents indicating they were very thorough and contained a lot of useful information that might be used in other contexts. It was agreed that a few diagrams and a 1 or 2 page summary for each document as well as a glossary of technical/biomedical terms would improve the clarity and accessibility of the documents.

For Action: - Secretary to produce brief summaries of the viral vector information for consideration at the next meeting and arrange for the full guidance documents to be placed on the Safety Office website.

8. Horizon Scan on Synthetic Biology a HSE (UK) short report.

Appendix I was noted and the point made in the agenda re-iterated "This field has the potential to develop quickly in the next ten years and may in the future have implications for biosafety"

9. Any other business

(a) The secretary informed the committee that he will report the business of the meeting to SHEC at its next meeting, probably in March.

(b) The secretary asked the opinion of members about carrying out the business of the committee by e-mail and circulating new guidance documents etc. It was agreed that rather than call a meeting when issues arise communication by e-mail was an efficient way of dealing with business. Any decisions made could then be formally ratified at the regular meetings.

(c) The secretary mentioned for information that the CEN Biosafety management standard developed by an international consortium is now available on the internet at:-

<http://www.cen.eu/CENORM/Sectors/technicalcommitteesworkshops/workshops/ws31.asp>.

This is likely to be the first step towards producing an ISO standard for Biosafety management.

(d) The secretary indicated that the date of the next meeting is likely to be either September or October and members will be circulated with a list of potential dates nearer the time.