

# THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

## Biosafety Committee

**Draft** Minutes of the 6<sup>th</sup> Biosafety Committee Meeting, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2010, Library, Safety Office, Cheung Yuet Ming Physics Building. 9.30 – 12.05.

Apologies were received from Dr Wallace Lim. The following members were present:-

	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Function/Role</b>
Professor F.C.C. Leung	School of Biological Sciences	Chairman
Professor G. Srivastava	Pathology	Medical Faculty Representative
Dr. K.S. Lo	LAU	CULATR liaison etc.
Professor John Bacon-Shone	Social Sciences	Independent representative
Dr. Mike Mackett	Safety Office	Secretary (BSO)
Professor Tsao	Anatomy	Medical Faculty representative
Ms Cindy Lee	Microbiology	Senior Technical Staff representative

### **1. Minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Biosafety Committee (23<sup>rd</sup> November 2009)**

The committee confirmed the tabled minutes (Appendix A) of the Biosafety Committee Meeting, held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2009, as a true and accurate record.

### **2. Matters arising from the minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting.**

i) Under point 3(i) the secretary contacted CUHK to establish under what conditions they would handle dengue virus. He reported to the meeting that they would operate at Class 3. He also reported that the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the Centre for Health Protection have produced a biosafety manual and published a revised second edition on the internet in 2008.

([http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/guidelines\\_on\\_biosafety\\_in\\_the\\_clinical\\_laboratory\\_2nd\\_edn.pdf](http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/guidelines_on_biosafety_in_the_clinical_laboratory_2nd_edn.pdf)). According to this manual they would also handle dengue virus at Class 3. He judged that considering the wide availability of this advice it was unlikely that they would review their assessment downwards to allow work at Class 2 and consequently did not pursue the matter further. The committee concurred.

ii) Under point 4 the secretary indicated that he had written to the Deans of Medicine and Science informing them that there was now a graduate school course in biological safety and that it was the committee's recommendation that it was made a compulsory component of Postgraduate studies for students who handled biological materials. He also indicated that he had had no response from either Dean. The committee was surprised and it was suggested that they may not have received the letter and the secretary agreed to write again.

**Action: The secretary to write to the Deans of Medicine and Science again, indicating the committee's recommendation that the new, currently optional, postgraduate course in biosafety was made a compulsory component of postgraduate studies for students who handled biological materials.**

### **3. Discussion on the membership of the Biosafety Committee.\***

The secretary repeated the point made in the agenda that for several reasons all members have now been on the committee for much longer than was initially envisioned. He asked for general comments and whether anyone was keen to step down. None of the members expressed a strong desire to step down although Ms Cindy Lee said she was prepared to do so. The discussion moved on to the makeup of the committee and echoed previous discussions (see minutes of the 2nd meeting of the Biosafety Committee at <http://www.hku.hk/safety/pdf/BCMA260407.doc>) suggesting that it was good practice to include on the committee someone not directly employed by the University (as is the case for biosafety committees in many countries)

It was suggested that this might be a recently retired individual with experience in biological safety issues, possibly an HKU alumnus. Dr Lin (director of the CPHL laboratory) was mentioned as a possible candidate as it was believed that she would be retiring from her position shortly and was fully conversant with biosafety issues. A further suggestion was made to include an RPG student (with a biological background) on the committee. This is the general practice of some university committees e.g. SHEC, and ensures student representation. The consensus view was that it was more important to have input from someone outside of the University who would read the papers, who was aware of the issues and could advise.

Following on from concerns that were expressed about confidentiality and whether PI's would be put off submitting risk assessments the committee discussed what it expected to receive from PI's. The committee was reminded that the biosafety policy said all new virus vector work and new work at BSL2 and above should be submitted for approval. The secretary commented that in practice this had not happened although he had seen a few proposals. He indicated that the main reason was probably because PI's were either not aware of the policy or felt that their work was simply an extension of older work and therefore not a new proposal.

The discussion then moved on to how biosafety issues were dealt with at the departmental level. It was concluded that the PI is the key individual in ensuring safety and that the major checkpoint in most departments was at grant submission (RGC and RFCID) where the head of department would sign a form that said the safety issues (including biosafety) had been considered and addressed. In order to assure the University that compliance with biosafety control measures had been adopted it was suggested that the biosafety officer should review these grant proposals. It was noted that a survey of these proposals was also being undertaken to ensure compliance with human ethical review approval procedures and that full proposals could be obtained from research services. It was acknowledged that there were other sources of funding where the safety issues might not be reviewed but it was felt important to make a start on reviewing the information that was available. The Biosafety Officer agreed and acknowledged that there was ample time to address any issues between the time the grants are submitted to the University administration and when they are sent out to the grants councils.

#### **Action:**

**1) The secretary, in conjunction with the Chairman, to consult with SHEC and investigate the possibility of including an RPG student and someone from outside of the University on the committee.**

**2) The secretary to ask research services for a copy of all the RGC and RFCID grant submissions in order to scan them for possible biosafety related concerns. If any issues arise they will be discussed by the biosafety committee or directly with the PI concerned.**

\*Technical point, not raised at the meeting

After the meeting the secretary discussed the issues that had been raised at the meeting with the Director of Safety who commented that as the biosafety committee is a sub-committee of SHEC, and SHEC will need to approve any change in committee makeup it would be wise to consult with them on the issue.

#### **4. Revision and review of guidance on the use of AAV (Adeno-Associated Virus) vectors**

The committee accepted the revised discussion on insertional mutagenesis ([Appendix C2](#)) and agreed it should be incorporated into the Universities guidance on AAV vectors. The secretary pointed out that like the AAV document a number of biosafety documents were due for review and suggested that the review period be extended from two to three years. This was agreed and the committee felt it appropriate for the biological safety officer to carry out the initial review of guidance and policy. Where little modification was required the committee felt it did not need to discuss it further other than for it to be tabled for approval at the subsequent biosafety committee meeting. Where substantial changes were made then the committee felt it should discuss the issues raised at a committee meeting.

**Action: - The secretary to arrange for the revised version of the AAV document to be uploaded to the safety office website**

#### **5. Guidance on Fluorescent Activated Cell Sorting (FACS) of unfixed cells**

The committee agreed to adopt the International Society for Analytical Cytology document [Schmidt et al (2007), Cytometry (A) 71(6):414-37] as University guidance on the fluorescent activated cell sorting of unfixed materials. The secretary asked how many FACS machines were in the University. The committee could not be definitive but identified some departments who had FACS machines, some purchased recently. The secretary agreed to circulate these departments with the guidance.

It was also noted that the document will be updated shortly and when it is the committee will review the guidance.

**Action:-**

**1) The secretary to arrange for the guidance to be included on the Safety Office website (or at least a link to the document) and circulated to departments identified as having FACS machines**

**2) The secretary to design a form for centralized FACS facilities to give researchers who want to use the facilities the relevant safety issues to be considered.**

#### **6. Guidance on Decontamination**

A number of members commented on Appendix E suggesting areas for improvement. These included adding guidance on storage conditions, shelf life and dilutions as well as including some discussion of hydrogen peroxide gaseous decontamination, chlorine dioxide based products

(such as Alcide) and the use of alcohol for cleaning surfaces. The secretary agreed to make the modifications and circulate the updated document for comment and approval.

**Action:- The secretary to modify the guidance to include the issues outlined at the meeting and circulate it to committee members, by e-mail, for comment.**

**7. Risk assessment forms for deliberate work with infectious agents and virus vectors.**

The form on risk assessment for work with adenovirus vectors was approved with few comments or discussion.

**8. CDC-APHIS project on competencies of BSL2,3,4 workers (for information)**

The secretary pointed out that a number of high level committees in the USA were about to report and give wide ranging recommendations on biosafety issues. This project on competencies of workers at BSL2, 3 and 4 from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) is just one of them.

**9. Any other business.**

No other business was considered.

**10. Date of Next Meeting.**

The secretary indicated that several international reviews along with recommendations to enhance biosafety are due to report towards the end of this year. He said that it seemed appropriate to review our Biosafety Policy in the light of these initiatives and proposed that the next meeting of the committee was in early 2011 to fit in with the timetable of these reports being released. The committee agreed without discussion.