THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Biosafety Committee

Minutes of the 2nd Biosafety Committee Meeting, 26th April 2007, 3rd Floor Library, Safety Office, James Lee Building. 10.30-12.40.

All members were present:-

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

1. Minutes

The committee confirmed the tabled minutes (Appendix A) of the meeting of the 23rd November 2006 were a true and accurate record.

2. Business Dealt With in Circulation

The committee recorded items of business dealt with in circulation since the last meeting (Appendices B and C).

a) Appendix B (Table of responses to a Summary of the first meeting of the biosafety committee and recommendations from the chair and secretary) elicited some comment.

i) Response to tabled paper 3 point iv)
While it was agreed that approval would be required for all new projects there was some discussion of whether PIs should seek approval for current projects. The point was made that the Human Ethics committee had required all projects in the University to comply with new arrangements and given a period of grace (until 2008) for those current projects that were approved under the old system. Following on from this a further point was made that in the old system for work with biological agents PIs were still expected to carry out risk assessments (with help from the safety office when necessary). All that has changed is that there will be additional oversight arrangements at the University level for both for the risk assessment and the appropriateness of the facilities being used. It was agreed in the circulated question not to require retrospective approval.

ii) Response to tabled paper 3 point iii)

The issue of expedited approvals was discussed both under this point and as part of the discussions of the biosafety policy in point 5 of the agenda. This minute is a record of both discussions and not strictly chronological.

The point was made that practically speaking researchers often worked up to the last minute when submitting proposals to granting bodies such as the RGC, ideas often being modified immediately before submission of the proposals. It was also pointed out that it seemed we were generating extra work for ourselves if we insist on seeing all proposals and their safety assessments when only a subset of them are ever funded. However whether it would be less work to review all grants on an expedited basis and then all successful grants again was doubted. It was noted that CULATR approval is required for all proposals before submission of a grant proposal for outside funding. A further observation was made in that different funding agencies have different rules and that some aspects of RGC proposals can be finalized after initial submission while other applications have to be complete from the outset. This ruled out any arrangements along the lines of a preliminary safety consideration followed by finalizing after the submission deadline.

Currently the UGC require the PI and HOD to sign a declaration that the experiments proposed in a grant application are safe. HKU's arrangements to facilitate this include a safety checklist which is aimed at helping the PI to think through what is being proposed. The secretary said that he felt this basic mechanism need not be altered too much although the checklist should be updated. He felt that some biosafety risk assessments and approvals could cover a variety of grant applications. For example the use of a particular vector system or say the handling of clinical samples would <u>not</u> need approval for each grant submitted. This would allow PIs to submit general risk assessments and SOPs well before the grant deadline.

Some clarification of the online submission system would be required and how safety approval worked for these applications.

Approval for particular facilities to carry out specified work was raised although no conclusions made. This is an area that needs to be discussed in more detail between the biosafety committee and the safety office, possibly with input from the estates office.

iii) Response to tabled paper 4 – membership of the committee and NIH requirements
The secretary informed the meeting that NIH/CDC will be visiting the Department of Microbiology in June. He indicated that the membership issue would be discussed in more detail under point 3 of the current meeting. He thought it would be interesting to see what the attitude of NIH/CDC was to the issue of outside involvement. The secretary indicated that another of their requirements "Training for committee members" should probably be discussed at a future meeting and that one way the secretary had envisaged this happening was by inclusion of a number of items on the agenda as being points "for information". Thus points 4, 6 and 7 on the current agenda could be viewed as training.

b) No further comment was made on Appendix C (A letter from the Department of Health on proposals to amend the Quarantine and Prevention of Disease Ordinance and the reply from the University Biological Safety Officer).

3. Membership of the Biosafety Committee

The secretary explained that on Thursday the 29th March 2007 he had presented SHEC with the case for appointing an external independent member to the Biosafety committee. They agreed with this suggestion particularly for the purpose of complying with NIH guidelines and felt that a representative from the Department of Health would be appropriate.

The committee discussed the practicalities of inviting the DOH to provide a representative to sit on the Biosafety committee. It was clear that the role of the outside member will have to be defined more clearly with issues such as confidentiality, presence on any inspection visits, whether we need to define the role as one with "voting rights" etc needing to be discussed.

A suggestion from a committee member which met with general approval was to delay any approach to the DOH until after the first round of RGC grant applications when the committee is more established and comfortable- in its operation.

4. Resolution of 58th World Health Assembly - May 2005

This agenda item was for information and there was no discussion

Agenda items 6 and 7 were taken next.

6. Paper 2. Biosecurity

This item on biosecurity was raised by the secretary to keep committee members aware of topical issues and concerns.

7. Paper 3. Working draft of International "Biorisk" Management Standard.

The secretary indicated that this item was essentially work in progress as the document would be modified over the following 6 months. The intention was to have the standard approved by November 2007. The secretary also indicated that it was unlike some standards – rather than being a prescriptive list of detailed tasks it will be a systems management document. For example the statement in the standard on disinfection is "The organisation shall establish and maintain procedures to ensure appropriate methods for disinfection and decontamination are chosen and implemented effectively" This will allow different organisations to find their own solutions to conform to the required standard.

There was no further discussion on the document. The secretary indicated he would circulate the draft standard after the 2nd meeting of the working group in Boston when public comment will be invited.

5. Paper 1 - Biosafety Policy.

The issue of whether on not to consult the University on the biosafety policy was discussed and it was agreed that a period of consultation of 1 month starting as soon as possible should be given to all who wish to comment. It was agreed to send the document to all terms of service 1 staff by E-mail and deliver hard copies to all Deans of Faculties, Heads of Departments and Safety Representatives.

The Chairman asked the secretary to crystallize the discussion and produce a framework for biosafety approval consistent with the points raised. Some of the discussion is summarised along with comments at agenda item 2a (ii) in the minutes above.

Comment was made on the various responsibilities of Heads of Departments (HODs) that are detailed throughout the document. The secretary said he agreed it could be confusing for HODs and that he had taken out a section outlining the responsibilities of Deans, HODs and PIs from the end of the document. It was suggested that this section on responsibilities be re-instated.

It was agreed that the next meeting should be at the beginning of July after the comments from the consultation process had been received. The secretary indicated that he would try and incorporate the comments into the document before the meeting but this will depend on the extent of the comments.

8. Any other business

There were no items brought for consideration under this agenda point and the meeting finished at 12.40.