Minutes for the 17th meeting of the Biosafety Committee of the University of Hong Kong. (A sub-committee of the Safety Health and Environment Committee).

Held on Thursday, October 20th 2016, 10.30 a.m. Room 412 at Professorial Block, Queen Mary Hospital.

The following members were present:-

	Affiliation	Function/Role
Professor K.S-L.Lam	Medicine	Chairman
Dr E.K.M. Hau	Safety Office	Safety Office Rep
Dr. K.S. Lo	LAU	CULATR liaison etc.
Dr VCH Lui	Surgery	Medical Faculty Rep
Dr. Mike Mackett	Safety Office	Secretary (BSO)
Ms Cindy Lee	School of Public Health	Technical Staff Rep

Apologies were received from. Dr C.F. Zhang (Dental Faculty Rep), Dr Hani El-Nezami (Science Faculty Rep). Professor F. K.S. Leung (Independent advisor) and Professor G.S.W. Tsao (Medical faculty Rep).

These minutes follow the numbered points detailed in the meeting agenda.

1. Minutes of the 15th meeting of the Biosafety Committee (October 9th 2015)
The minutes of the previous physical meeting of the Biosafety Committee were circulated in March 2016 and members approved them by e-mail. For completeness they were attached to the agenda.

2. Matters arising from the minutes of the 15th meeting (action points etc.)
The secretary arranged for the minutes to be uploaded to the safety office website.

3. Agenda of the 16th e-mail based meeting
The secretary indicated that the agenda of the 16th meeting had been uploaded to the Safety Office website as a record of the matters considered and that as there were no comments on the proceedings the document would be kept instead of minutes.

4. Introductory course in biosafety
The secretary noted that the next introductory course in biological safety was to be held in January 2017 and asked that if members were aware of staff or students who might benefit that it be brought to their attention. He also indicated that the slides used in a previous session had been uploaded to the Safety Office.

5. Risk assessments and guidance on retrovirus vectors
The secretary informed the committee that over the past few years a number of departments had submitted risk assessments for approval of work with retrovirus vectors on the form RA3. A typical form with the secretary's response was included with the agenda as examples of the issues involved. The secretary indicated that from this and

other responses it was clear that the questions could be improved to ensure the applicants better understood the intent of the questions. Consequently he produced an updated RA3 form (containing only minor modifications) which the committee reviewed and approved for use in assessing risks associated with retrovirus vector work.

The secretary also noted that in the process of revising the form he realized the current guidance on retrovirus vectors contained a number of links that were out of date and that some new information should be incorporated. An updated version of the guidance was reviewed by the committee following a summary of the changes by the secretary and approved. The consensus of opinion was that SHEC should be informed of this approval and that it was unlikely that they would want to review the technical details.

Action point: It was agreed to circulate relevant departments and individuals outlining changes made to the RA3 form and retrovirus guidance.

6. Biosafety Policy update

The secretary indicated that a minor update to the safety policy was necessitated in order to incorporate recently approved guidance documents within its text. The opportunity was also taken to clarify section 5.4 on risk groups and levels of containment. The secretary noted that the principal changes were:-

i) Reference to the good microbiological practice guidance included in section 5.3
ii) Reference to the risk assessment document added to section 3.4
iii) Reference made to the handling of clinical samples document in section 5.10.
iv) Reference to the Biosafety level 2 document has been made in section 5.4

The secretary explained that Section 5.4 of the current policy was an abbreviation of a longer section in a previous version resulting in a section that was somewhat confused. This section was basically replaced with information found in the recently approved risk assessment document.

Members then discussed the amendments and approved them suggesting that the document was forwarded to SHEC for final approval because it was the main Biosafety policy document of the University.

Action point: Secretary to present the updated biosafety policy to SHEC for approval

7. Biosafety basics

The secretary asked the committee if they felt it would be valuable to summarize information on the need for import or export licenses when acquiring biological samples or reagents. Members discussed this issue and indicated that a single source of information on import and export licenses would be useful and the secretary agreed to prepare this for the next meeting.

Action point: Secretary to produce a document on the requirements for import and export licenses in respect of biological samples.

8. Hazard/Risk group classification updates (For information*)
The committee noted that the UK regulators (HSE) have published a revised version of the Approved List of Biological Agents which is a legally binding standard in the UK and classifies biological agents hazardous to humans into hazard groups (HG). The committee was also made aware of the fact that ABSA International (the new name for the American Biosafety Association) have developed an extensive risk group database and created a free App for Apple and Android devices which allows access to the database on mobile devices.

9. Follow up on the US Gain of Function moratorium (For Information*)
The committee noted that the National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity (NSABB) who oversee gain of function work (GOF) have released a 100+ page Final Report – "**Recommendations for the Evaluation and Oversight of Proposed Gain-of-Function Research**" (May 24, 2016). The committee's conclusion was that the implications for HKU are at present unclear, primarily because the authorities have not responded to the recommendations. It was also noted that the only department within HKU that receive funds from NIH/CDC (as far as the secretary is aware) was the School of Public Health and they currently do not use these for GOF studies.

10. A Note from CDC about the Federal Select Agent Program (For information*)
The committee noted that three federal reviews of the select agent program were released last autumn, each containing recommendations designed to strengthen the federal government's biosafety and security practices and oversight, both through the Federal Select Agent Program. It was also noted that CDC has created a website in order to keep stakeholders updated on the work that is underway at CDC and to inform of any changes to the program. The secretary indicated that the School of Public Health is the only department in HKU that is inspected under the select agent regulations.

11. Proposed reviews of key international Biosafety Advice (For information*)
The committee was informed of various significant documents giving advice on biosafety that are currently being revised. These included:-
1) The WHO Laboratory biosafety manual
2) The Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories (BMBL) 5th edition
3) Part 3 of the UK Scientific Advisory Committee for Genetic Modification (SACGM) Compendium of Guidance and
4) The UK Advisory Committee on Dangerous pathogens (ACDP) guidance on 'deliberate work' with biological agents

12. Recent laboratory acquired infections and incidents in the news (For information*)
The committee received various reports of recent accidents either resulting in laboratory acquired infection (LAI) or uncontrolled exposure to pathogens. These included an LAI of Zika reported in Pittsburgh area, an unexplained case of HIV in a laboratory worker probably due to laboratory exposure and probably the most significant incident, of the potential exposure of personnel in 194 federal, academic and commercial laboratories in every US state, 9 countries and 3 U.S. territories. The committee were surprised to note

that there were a total of 575 shipments of live anthrax (incompletely inactivated samples) delivered to labs from 2004 through to 2015, although there were no illnesses reported.

13. Dates of next meetings.
The next two biosafety committee meetings were tentatively scheduled for 9th March 2017 and the 19th October 2017. The secretary indicated these dates were intended as a guideline only and would be confirmed nearer the time with committee members by e-mail.

***For more detailed information on the "For Information" items please see the agenda.**