

Draft Agenda for the 14th meeting of the Biosafety Committee of the University of Hong Kong. (A sub-committee of the Safety, Health and Environment Committee).

To be held on Thursday, March 11th 2015, 11.00 a.m., Room 412 at Professorial Block, Queen Mary Hospital.

1. Minutes of the 13th meeting of the Biosafety Committee (October 9th 2014)

Members were reminded that the minutes of the previous meeting of the Biosafety Committee were circulated in March 2014 and approved by e-mail. There were no further comments.

2. Matters arising from the minutes of the 13th meeting (action points etc.)

2.1 Under point 3 of the agenda, the review of guidance on handling clinical samples, the committee agreed that it would be useful to simplify the title of the document and include the standard protective procedures outlined in the safety matters circular. This has been done and the modified document is attached as Appendix 1.

The secretary also agreed to look at what options were available for annual on line training in respect of blood borne viruses. On closer examination it was apparent that the courses used by many institutions were either restricted in terms of access i.e. only available to members of the institution or available by paying an appropriate fee. The majority of freely accessible web pages were rather basic and did not include a means of determining how effective the training had been.

2.2 Under point 4 of the agenda, Biosafety Level 2. The document has been modified to contain appropriate references and include a checklist. This is included as Appendix 2.

3. US Moratorium on certain gain of function experiments (for information)

We included in our previous agenda reports of incidents at the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the NIH. Shortly after our last meeting the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy embarked on a process aimed at considering the risks and benefits associated with certain gain-of-function studies. As part of this process they announced a funding "pause" for NIH monies allocated to the work. Reports of this are contained in Appendix 3a "U.S. Government Gain-of-Function Deliberative Process and Research Funding Pause on Selected Gain-of-Function Research Involving Influenza, MERS, and SARS Viruses" (www.phe.gov/s3/dualuse/Documents/gain-of-function.pdf) and the US NSABB statement (Appendix 3b). Reports in the scientific press are also included as Appendix 3c and Appendix 3d.

4. Further reporting of incidents in the USA (for information)

Following concern over certain gain of function experiments it appears there has been a greater focus on laboratory safety and accidents/incidents. Appendix 4a is from ProMed mail and details two reports of various incidents. Appendix 4b is also from Promed mail

and is a report on an incident involving the handling of Ebola specimens at CDC in December 2014.

5. Laboratory incidents in the UK (for information)

Appendix 5 is a fairly long and accurate, slightly alarmist, press story from the Guardian newspaper in the UK on accidents/incidents at high containment laboratories in the UK.

6. Laboratory Biosafety and Biosecurity Risk Assessment Technical Guidance Document (for information)

This document attached as Appendix 6 has been produced by the International Biological Threat Reduction programme at the Sandia National Laboratories (USA), in collaboration with "The International Federation of Biosafety Associations". It is a quite detailed and authoritative technical guidance but of limited use to most researchers in HKU.

7. Date of next meeting.

It was agreed last October to tentatively schedule the next Biosafety Committee meeting for the 8th October 2015. It was agreed that these dates are flexible and would be confirmed nearer the time with committee members by e-mail.