

Minutes and update (italics) for the 11th 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 3rd 2013, 9.30 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)
Professor F. K.S. Leung	Education	Independent advisor
Professor G.S.W. Tsao	Anatomy	Medical faculty Rep
Ms Cindy Lee	School of Public Health	Technical Staff Rep

Apologies were received from. Dr C.F. Zhang (Dental Faculty Rep) and Dr Hani El-Nezami (Science Faculty Rep).

Please note text in italics is notes on developments of the issues discussed under the same point.

1. Minutes of the 10th meeting of the Biosafety Committee (14th March 2013)

The draft minutes of the 10th meeting of the Biosafety Committee were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. Matters arising from the minutes of the 10th meeting (action points etc.)

- i) The secretary informed the meeting that he had some difficulty booking a room for the next Introductory Biosafety course due to a high demand for lecture theatres. The committee made a number of suggestions which the secretary said he would follow up on.
- ii) The secretary informed the meeting that despite circulating the Risk assessment and Biosafety Policy documents widely there had been no comments. He indicated that both documents will be sent to SHEC for final approval.
- iii) The meeting was informed that the secretary had arranged for the “guidance on the use of cell lines in research” to be placed on the Safety Office website.

3. New arrangements for Safety approval of CULATR applications.

The meeting was also informed that the CULATR committee approved a proposal that Heads of Department could give safety approval for applications without reference to the Safety Office unless advice was required. This is as a result of some of the discussions this committee has had regarding research safety approval. When necessary the LAU will discuss with the Safety Office the application for animal holding space.

This altered process has been in place for several months and appears to be well received by users.

4. New Research application checklists - including Biosafety

The meeting was informed that the new research proposal checklists (discussed at a previous meeting) were presented to SHEC. Following their discussions some of them were revised and subsequently sent to Research Services. It was emphasized that the revised checklists have more of an emphasis on the safety issues to be considered by the PI and expand the declaration to underline the importance the PI has in promoting and maintaining safety standards.

5. Oversight of gain of function experiments.

The meeting was informed that Professor Peiris of the School of Public Health had approached the Safety Office with a request for the University to develop a mechanism to oversee “dual use” or “gain of function” experiments. Some claim this type of experiment might have potentially devastating consequences and consequently it would be important to scrutinize the work closely. Following some discussion it was agreed to set up a small working group of the Biosafety committee comprising of the secretary, the applicant and two other independent members. Several names were suggested as potential members and the Secretary agreed to ask Professor Bacon-Shone the Director of the Social Sciences research centre and Professor Jin from the Department of Biochemistry if they would be prepared to serve on the committee.

Both Professor Bacon-Shone and Professor Jin agreed to be involved in the working group.

6. Critical Infrastructure

The committee was presented with a set of e-mail communications between a unit of the Hong Kong police and the safety office regarding what the police referred to as “Critical Infrastructure”. This police unit has been set up to monitor the security of infrastructure in Hong Kong and it appears a wide definition of what constitutes critical infrastructure has been adopted. Broadly speaking this appears to be anything a terrorist might target and the police consider this encompasses the State Key Laboratory for Emerging Infectious Disease (A BSL3 facility in the Faculty of Medicine building). There was general discussion around the request of the police for a meeting and who it would be best to inform about the visit.

The facility was not in operation at the beginning of October, due to scheduled maintenance and it was decided in consultation with Dr Poon to invite the critical infrastructure unit to visit the laboratory. As the laboratory is now a Medical Faculty core facility the management team (Professor Peiris –acting head of the School of Public Health, Professor Wu - Head of Microbiology and the two departmental Safety Officers, Dr Honglin Chen and Dr Leo Poon) were consulted. On the 10th of October two police officers spent several hours discussing their remit and physically inspecting the laboratory. Following this an invitation was given from the unit to attend a seminar at police headquarters on security and the operation and remit of the critical infrastructure

unit. Several University staff attended on the 5th of November and it is expected that there will be sporadic contact between the police and the BSL3 management committee.

7. Dates of next meetings.

It was agreed to schedule the next committee meetings for the 13th of March 2014 and the 9th of October 2014. It was also agreed that the dates would be flexible and confirmed nearer the time by e-mail.