Biological Safety @ Texas A&M: Roles and Responsibilities

The Texas A&M biological safety program developed from the University’s commitment to address and comply with federal and local requirements regarding the use of biohazards and recombinant DNA.

Texas A&M University, the Institution

Texas A&M University has instituted and maintains a biosafety program for all faculty, staff, and students at Texas A&M and affiliated institutions, including the Texas A&M Health Science Center and certain agencies of the state of Texas (Texas A&M AgriLife Research, Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station, and Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory), who may be exposed to biological hazards during performance of their duties or activities. The program is designed to achieve and maintain regulatory compliance as well as provide a way for researchers as well as the public to be informed and protected from biohazards. The University specifically establishes and implements policies that provide for the safe conduct of biological and recombinant DNA research and that ensure compliance. The University also ensures proper training for the Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) chair and its members, the Biological Safety Officer (BSO), and Principal Investigators (PIs).

Institutional Official (IO)

The President of Texas A&M has appointed the Vice President for Research (VPR) as the Institutional Official (IO) responsible for the biological safety program. The VPR appoints the members and the chair of the IBC. Administratively, the IBC and BSO report to the VPR. The chair of the IBC also reports directly to the VPR. The final authority for decisions pertaining to conduct of research and research compliance is the IO.

Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC)

The IBC is responsible, as articulated in University Rule 24.01.01M8 Biohazards and/or Recombinant DNA in Research, for reviewing research involving recombinant DNA and biohazardous research conducted at or sponsored by Texas A&M and affiliated institutions for compliance with the current versions of the NIH Guidelines for Research Involving Recombinant DNA Molecules (NIH Guidelines) and the Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories (BMBL), as applicable, and approving those research projects that are found to conform with these regulatory documents. This review must include, among other items, an independent assessment of the containment levels required for the proposed research and an assessment of the facilities, procedures, practices, training, and expertise of personnel involved in research.

http://rcb.tamu.edu
Chair of the IBC
The chair of the IBC presides at all meetings of the IBC and may assign such additional duties to other members of the IBC as deemed necessary for the conduct of the work of the IBC. The chair of the IBC reports to the VPR. The chair of the IBC also assures that members of the committee are appropriately trained.

Biological Safety Officer (BSO)
The BSO is the designated scientific-administrative officer who assures compliance and biosafety of research involving biohazards and/or recombinant DNA conducted at Texas A&M and affiliated institutions. The BSO provides technical advice to the IBC and researchers on laboratory containment, security, and safety procedures. The BSO overseees periodic inspections to ensure that laboratory standards are vigorously followed and reports significant problems or violations. The BSO reports directly to the VPR.

Biosafety Program Office
The Biosafety Program Office provides staff support to the IBC and the BSO. In addition, this office helps assure safety and compliance by conducting biosafety-related inspections and other monitoring activities, by performing training, and by assisting PIs and IBC members in the review and approval process. The office includes the Biosafety Occupational Health Program, whose mission is to ensure that all persons exposed or potentially exposed to hazardous biological agents in the course of their activities at Texas A&M and affiliated institutions, are offered the best possible information regarding the biological hazards to which they are exposed and access to competent occupational health medicine providers.

Department Heads and Deans
Every IBC permit includes a signature of the PI’s supervisor as a part of the assurance. This signature acknowledges that the supervisor is aware of the permit and approves of all the information as presented. In addition, supervisors are responsible for assuring that research involving the use of biohazards and recombinant DNA is appropriately reviewed and approved by the IBC prior to the initiation of any work. The supervisors are also responsible for ensuring the facilities and infrastructure are adequate for the proposed work.

Principal Investigators (PIs)
The PI is the one individual researcher who is designated by the institution to direct a project or program and who is responsible to the institution for the scientific and technical direction of that project or program. It is the responsibility of the PI to carry out their research in compliance with all federal, state, and university requirements with approval from the IBC. Principal Investigators must be trained and knowledgeable in appropriate laboratory techniques, safety procedures, and hazards associated with handling infectious agents and are responsible for the conduct of work with any infectious agents or materials. The PI is responsible for the proper training of laboratory staff and for enforcement of IBC rulings pertaining to lab specific research. The PI is also responsible for lab manuals, SOPs, licenses, and permits for transport and use of biological agents and recombinant DNA.