

Biological Safety @ Texas A&M:

Roles and Responsibilities

Texas A&M University's biological safety program was developed from the University's commitment to protect faculty, staff, students, visitors, the general public, and the environment from the risk of potential occupational exposure to biohazardous materials and recombinant DNA and to ensure that all activities and facilities used to conduct such work are in compliance with applicable federal and state laws, regulations, and guidelines.

Texas A&M University, the Institution

Texas A&M University 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 University also ensures access to appropriate training for the Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) chair and its members, the Biological Safety Officer (BSO), Principal Investigators (PIs), and staff and students conducting research, teaching, or testing activities with biohazardous materials.

Institutional Official (IO)

The President of Texas A&M has appointed the Vice President for Research (VPR) as the 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 15.99.06.M1 Use of Biohazards, Biological Toxins and Recombinant DNA and Dual Use Research of Concern, for reviewing research involving recombinant DNA and/or biohazards 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 and Synthetic Nucleic Acid Molecules (NIH Guidelines) and the Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories (BMBL), as applicable, and approving those research projects which conform with these regulatory documents. This review must include 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.

Chair of the IBC

The chair of the IBC presides over all meetings of the IBC and may assign additional duties to other members of the IBC as deemed necessary. The chair of the IBC is responsible to ensure that all members of the committee, including alternate members and community representatives, are appropriately trained. The vice chair may preside over IBC meetings in the absence of the chair, or if the chair must recuse him/herself during a meeting.

Biological Safety Officer (BSO)

The BSO is the designated scientific-administrative officer who ensures compliance and biosafety of research involving biohazards and/or recombinant DNA conducted at Texas A&M and affiliated institutions. The BSO serves as an IBC member and provides technical advice to the IBC, as well as researchers on laboratory containment, security, and safety procedures. The BSO oversees periodic laboratory inspections to ensure that laboratory standards are followed and departures are corrected in a timely manner. The BSO reports significant problems or violations to the IBC and NIH/OBA, as necessary. The BSO reports directly to the Associate VPR.

Biosafety Program Office

The Office of Biosafety provides administrative support to the IBC and the BSO. The associate biosafety officers ensure safety and compliance by performing lab inspections and other monitoring activities, by conducting biosafety training, and by assisting PIs and IBC members in the review and approval process of IBC submissions. The biosafety office also includes the Biosafety Occupational Health Program, whose mission is to ensure that all persons exposed or potentially exposed to animals or hazardous infectious 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 potentially exposed and access to competent occupational health medicine providers.

Department Heads and Deans

IBC applications include a sign-off by the PI's supervisor prior to submission of the application to the IBC. The supervisor's signature acknowledges that the supervisor is aware of the submission, the scope of the work with biohazards proposed, and approves of all the information as presented. 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 and that the facilities and infrastructure are adequate and available 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, as appropriate. 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 taking place in his/her lab. PIs are responsible for the timely submission of annual renewals and amendments to notify the IBC of any changes to the scope of work with biohazards. The PI is responsible for providing lab and agent-specific training to laboratory staff and for enforcement of IBC decisions pertaining to lab specific research. The PI is also responsible for maintaining all necessary SOPs and permits for import, transport, and/or use of biological agents and recombinant DNA.

<http://rcb.tamu.edu>