

Strengthening laboratory biosecurity

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The escape of a dangerous pathogen from a high-security laboratory is the stuff of science fiction novels – and many researchers' nightmares – but the story of the recent outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease proved to have just such a prologue.

This episode has now been investigated and reported upon¹, but it also highlighted the broader issue of the security surrounding research use of hazardous biological material and infectious agents. At the end of last year the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee launched an inquiry on *Biosecurity in UK Research Laboratories* to which IOB and the Biosciences Federation responded jointly in January.

The inquiry was relevant to laboratories handling serious animal and human pathogens, animal pathogens which can cause disease in man (zoonoses) and pathogens which could damage food or economic security. Many such organisms are handled under licence.

IOB recommended that attention be paid to improving the capacity for such

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/upload/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/fmdreview/fmd_2007_review.pdf

work within the UK and urged tighter regulation and stricter monitoring of licensed facilities. The value of examining all incidents, even those which do not lead to hazardous escapes, was stressed as well as the value of regular and unannounced inspections of licensed facilities from both the point of view of structure and procedures.

Over-reliance on internally developed training and monitoring procedures was highlighted as a potential problem area, particularly as necessary cooperation can require the movement of agents and researchers between facilities. Contingency planning for critical incidents is important and we stressed the need to give a high priority to biosecurity when weighed against other considerations, including short-term funding constraints.

The IUSS Committee began taking oral evidence in March and will publish their report soon.

The IOB/BSF submission can be accessed on the policy pages at: www.iob.org/policy.

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A safety culture?