Adapt and Grow...

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I attended my first biological safety conference in 1981 in Athens, Georgia. As a graduate student in Dr. Jerry Tulis’ Biohazard Science Program at UNC-CH, I was in awe of the experts I was able to meet at that meeting. Only a few years after the original NIH recombinant DNA Guidelines were developed, and before the first draft of the “BMBL,” I was introduced to the experts—Dr. Emmett Barkley, Dr. John Richardson, Dr. Everett Hanel, Manny Barbeito, and others who were willing to take some novice students under their wings. I learned that being a biosafety professional meant being highly motivated and unselfish, willing to take time to encourage and teach students and others new to the biosafety field. I watched the sharing of experiences with other well-seasoned colleagues at the annual conferences. I learned that if you wanted to know something, you picked up the phone and called, and someone would help you find the answer.

In fact, phone calls and the annual conference were the primary means of biosafety communication. In 1984, biosafety professionals came together formally with the birth of the American Biological Safety Association (ABSA). In the mid-80s, the first ABSA newsletter was published with Dr. Jerry Tulis as the editor, and it became the first attempt at formal, routine communications among members. One of the greatest accomplishments of ABSA was the publication of the Journal of the American Biological Safety Association (JABSA) in 1996, with Dr. Mel First as the first editor. The Journal was born out of the goals of ABSA to provide effective communication among ABSA members, expand professional awareness of biological safety, and advance the profession as a scientific discipline.

We’ve watched ABSA grow over the past 17 years, along with the scope of the field of biosafety. No longer does our field consist solely of laboratory safety specialists. Now we see our influence in the pharmaceutical industry, frontline healthcare, shipping and transport, international issues, and safety product and device industries. The widespread use of the worldwide Web has assisted us in many ways with instant information, but we find we need direction and guidance to distinguish between irrational perceptions and discerning risk analysis.

We are learning to adapt to our new growth and needs. Based on input from ABSA members, our Publications Committee, under the leadership of Dr. Joe Van Houten, reviewed the impact and use of the Journal with the intent of building on the foundation of a scientific document for biosafety professionals. A new journal name, a new look, and a new format are the results of several years of discussions. Applied Biosafety now includes not only full manuscripts and chapters, but updates on new guidelines and regulations, published responses from ABSA to revised or proposed guidelines (thanks to Bill Homovec and the Technical Review Committee), helpful hints for using the Web or for developing training programs, and a broad range of topics from environmental microbiology to bloodborne pathogens. We owe a debt of gratitude to Drs. Richard C. Knudsen and Ira F. Salkin (Co-Editors) and the other Journal publication staff for tackling this challenge and producing such a fine product.

Hopefully, the expanded interests and issues of the members of ABSA are reflected in this new journal format. In keeping with the honorable biosafety tradition of sharing our experiences and teaching others, let’s remember to contribute to our Journal. The Publications Committee has provided us with ample opportunity to do so.