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The abstracts in this edition of Applied Biosafety are compiled from ABSA’s 44th Annual Biological Safety Conference, held October 21-24, 2001. Once again the conference served to inform us about current biosafety issues and regulatory initiatives. We learned about the diversity of biosafety programs in other countries, biosafety issues encountered in the design and commissioning of containment facilities, pathogen inventory tracking tools, new innovative training techniques, and current approaches to decontamination. Technical papers on testing of decontamination systems, the creation of aerosols, and other applied biosafety research studies were presented. This is in keeping with ABSA’s goal of exchanging scientific knowledge and advancing biosafety as a scientific discipline.

Roundtable sessions were also included in the scientific program and provided a forum for interactive discussion on emerging issues. We discussed the pros and cons of using risk groups vs. biosafety levels. Classification of organisms according to risk group has been used by some countries to categorize the relative hazards of infective organisms. The roundtable discussion centered on whether or not the classification of organisms according to risk group is appropriate for the handling of biological hazards in the laboratory setting. For example, does the risk group system take into account the procedures that are to be employed during the manipulation of a particular organism? Would a classification system based on laboratory biosafety levels be an acceptable alternative? In addition to the inherent characteristics of each organism, this system includes the engineering, operational, technical, and physical requirements for manipulating a particular pathogen.

A second roundtable session presented the proposed new shipping regulations for infectious materials. Those of us involved in the packaging and shipping of specimens know how problematic this issue is. Shipping infectious materials can be especially difficult for some of our international affiliates where the availability of approved packaging and carriers is severely limited. The UN Committee on the Transport of Dangerous Goods is currently reviewing the requirements in the Model Regulations. Some of the problems identified include the complexity of the requirements and the notion that some requirements are directed to perceived risk rather than real risk. ABSA has a consulting status with the UN Subcommittee of Experts and can be proactive in the modification of the regulations. Members wishing to become involved in our effort should send an email to Penny Holeman at pholeman@acdus.jnj.com.

The Scientific Program Committee has released the “Call for Papers” for our 45th Annual Biosafety Conference to be held October 20-23, 2002 in San Francisco. All topics related to biological safety are requested, with a special emphasis on original research. I encourage everyone whose paper is approved for poster or oral presentation to submit his or her paper to be considered for publication in our Journal.

Finally, on a personal note, it is with sadness that we are publishing notification to our members of the death of Rich Knudsen. Rich was a Past-President of ABSA, a former editor of the Journal, and mentor to many of us. It was his wish that donations be made to ABSA to award the best paper published and a memorial fund has been established for this purpose.