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This past year has been one of significant growth and challenge for our organization. Following the anthrax letter incidents and subsequent hoaxes, many ABSA members and exhibitors were called upon by government agencies, industry, and academia to provide assistance and expertise in areas such as risk assessment and mitigation, containment, engineering controls, decontamination, risk communication, and others. The membership of ABSA and the organization as a whole met this challenge and provided the assistance needed to help get the United States “back to business.” I am proud of our membership, our professionalism, and the service we have provided to help overcome this crisis.

As we all know, the Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Response Act of 2002 was signed into law. This law codifies new and tougher biosecurity requirements that will significantly impact all programs working with select agents. Much of this responsibility will be borne by biosafety professionals. (We all remember the call to “report our Select Agent/High Consequence Agent holdings.”) ABSA’s Biosecurity Task Force continues to work toward keeping the membership informed and to develop “how-to tools” for implementation of aspects of a biosecurity program.

ABSA has a steadily growing number of affiliates and international members, all committed to promulgating biosafety practices and enhancing harmonization of global practices. In September 2002, ABSA and OSHA entered into an Alliance to further promote biosafety in the workplace. Internationally, ABSA participates in observer status on the United Nations Subcommittee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods (TDG Subcommittee). Our thanks to Penny Holeman for volunteering to coordinate a consensus position of our members and represent ABSA this past year. Mary Cipriano will continue to lead us in this important endeavor. The International Biosafety Working Group met prior to the conference and received updates on the international compendium of biosafety rules and regulations, a comparison of risk groups and biosafety level classifications, an approach for developing a core biosafety course curriculum, and the status of TDG Subcommittee regulations. The goal is to provide this information in a compendium form accessible via web sites to biosafety professionals worldwide. The next meeting will be hosted by the European Biological Safety Association (EBSA) in Lyon, France in May 2003.

In terms of growth, ABSA has gained 157 new members this year, had a conference attendance of over 500 participants, and provided 19 preconference courses. These represent significant increases over the previous years. In addition to their core courses which are in high demand, this year the Teaching and Education Committee offered a number of new and timely courses including BSL-4 containment, large-scale decontamination, program auditing, radiation safety, and developing an Institutional Biosafety Committee. As always, T&E has done an incredible job as educators.

The Local Arrangements Committee (Larry Gibbs, Chair), and the Scientific Program Committee (Ros Rutledge-Burns, Chair) did an outstanding job in making the annual conference in San Francisco an unprecedented success. The location, hotel, and closing banquet were outstanding. This year’s Eagleson lecturer, Dr. Ronald Atlas, President of the American Society for Microbiology (ASM), provided a timely and riveting discussion centered around
current issues in rDNA technology, biosecurity, and ethical concerns surrounding the publication and dissemination of scientific information that may have connections to national security. We will undoubtedly hear more about these topics in the near future. Our Wedum lecturer, Dr. Thomas Folks, presented in-depth information on occupational exposure to retroviruses. Our Gross Memorial Lecture was delivered by Mr. T. Scott Alderman of Duke University Medical School who provided an informative presentation on the assessment of different methods to reduce bioaerosol production. This is the type of information that leads us forward in applying risk reduction strategies in the workplace. Overall, this year’s scientific program was among the most memorable in years.

In closing I would like to welcome our new council members Janet Peterson (Secretary), Ben Fontes (Councilor), Stefan Wagener (President-Elect), and Steve Kridel (Councilor Pro-Tem) and thank our outgoing council members Debra Hunt and Betsy Gilman for their services. Special thanks go to our current Past-President, Maureen Best, for her outstanding efforts and success in broadening ASBA’s understanding and participation in global biosafety and laying a solid foundation for ABSA to work within the international community of biosafety professionals.