Having just returned from CDC’s 8th National Symposium on Biosafety in Atlanta, I have again been reminded of our members’ dedication and commitment to promote biosafety and our Association. In front and behind the scenes, our members were busy interacting with participants, and the ABSA information booth staffed by Maureen Best (Past-President) and Sandy Ellis (Marketing Committee Chair), received frequent visits and distributed many brochures. With a record turnout, the conference was a huge success and exemplified the ability of ABSA as a sponsor to work together with CDC and the Office of Health and Safety to establish new standards in service delivery. I would like to use this opportunity to thank all of you who contributed to this conference and made it such a great success and learning experience for our participants. Unfortunately, one of our members and active contributors will no longer be able to attend these events. Dr. Michael P. Kiley, longtime Biosafety Officer for ARS and ARS Homeland Security, died unexpectedly on January 24, 2004. We will miss him dearly and our thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends.

In March, the Council met in Nashville for 2½ days to discuss and develop a new strategy for ABSA that will allow us to meet the needs of our members and other stakeholders in the years to come. In preparation for this important meeting, the Council has engaged the services of Lawrence-Leiter and Company (LLC) to perform a comprehensive assessment of ABSA and the way we do business. LLC has been in touch with committee chairs, members, councilors, and the ABSA National Office to conduct extensive surveys and interviews. The results of this assessment were shared with the Council in March and will then be used for our strategic planning sessions. This is an exciting opportunity for our Association to review what we have accomplished in the past, in order to develop a new business model that will allow ABSA to better deliver our services and respond more effectively to the challenges we will be facing in the future.

ABSA is currently in the process of establishing closer working relationships with the biosafety office of the World Health Organization (WHO). Initial discussions over the past years by our Past-Presidents, Maureen Best and Barbara Johnson, have now resulted in ABSA’s active participation as part of the Biosafety Advisory Group (BAG) that WHO uses as a panel of experts to address international issues of biosafety. Already, we were able to actively participate in the development of the 3rd edition of the WHO biosafety guidelines and will be working with WHO on other exciting projects. My personal thanks to Dr. Nicoletta Previsani and Dr. Bradford Kay from WHO for their trust in the ability of our association to provide quality and timely input in all matters related to biosafety.

As I write this page, Winnipeg is experiencing records low of -45° to -50° but by the time you read it, Spring will be close by. I wish you success during this year in all your professional and personal endeavors and look forward to seeing many of you during the year at various events.

Stefan Wagener
Canadian Science Centre for Human and Animal Health, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada