Response from the Co-Editors: An Explanation of the Applied Biosafety Review Policy

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Question: Can you explain your review process and approximate timeline for publication of submissions?

Applied Biosafety is a peer-reviewed scientific journal. As such, we have learned from, and emulate, the best practices and principles in established top-tier scientific journals. It is important to keep in mind that as with other reputed scientific journals, content, reviewers, and policies adapt and grow to meet current challenges and improve upon practices. Our review process is initiated when Applied Biosafety receives a manuscript. The Production Editor and Co-Editors perform an initial review to ensure the submission is in correct format, relevant or appropriate to the audience, and meets minimal quality standards for publication. Two, and sometimes three, reviewers are selected from the Editorial Review Board (and potentially from the membership when the topic matter is unique) to review the submission. In the case where individuals are chosen from the membership, they have demonstrated experience and have served in the past as reviewers or in various editorial capacities. Reviewers are selected based on acknowledged areas of expertise and, in the Co-Editors’ best judgment, that no conflict of interest would occur when reviewing the submission. We put forth best efforts to minimize instances where selecting a reviewer could provide an unfair academic, industrial, or contractual competitive advantage to the reviewer by virtue of having the opportunity to learn of novel unpublished information and initiatives.

Reviewers are requested to make recommended changes directly to the manuscript, when possible, to better clarify and assist the author in making revisions. These are recommendations for consideration that exemplify means to address ambiguities, omissions, and the like, and not endorsed requirements by the Co-Editors. At times, the recommended changes will address systemic requirements that recur throughout the submission, such as development of thesis and overall depth or expression of knowledge. Reviewers are also asked to provide a commentary on the value of the manuscript via a standard form and with written declaration. When the judgment of two reviewers diverges significantly, the Co-Editors send the submission to a third reviewer. Final review information is provided back to the senior author or the agent handling author correspondence. It is not uncommon for a manuscript to be accepted pending consideration of revisions, or to require more extensive revisions for acceptance. This is experienced by authors submitting manuscripts to Applied Biosafety as well as other scientific peer-reviewed journals, and should not be construed as a professional insult.

Applied Biosafety reviews primarily focus on the content and quality of the manuscript so that it meets the highest standards and provides value to our readers. While content is our primary concern, we employ a professional proofreading and publishing agency to correct grammar, spelling, and syntax errors that escape the authors’ review. In the past, some publications have not gone through the same rigorous review process. These include those submissions from the recent CDC Biosecurity Symposium where presenters were literally hand-picked to lead
sessions as they were recognized as renowned experts in their area. Part of their invitation to speak included publishing their submissions, as presented, in Applied Biosafety. Those submissions were reviewed by experts with the understanding that the material had been presented in a public forum and was to be provided to ABSA for publication in that format. Submissions that are typically not “articles,” such as Letters to the Editor, Perspectives, Viewpoints, Commentaries, Book Reviews, and ABSA News, are reviewed by Co-Editors, Assistant Editors, Associate Editors, and International Editors. In cases where information is unique, members from the Editorial Review Board and recognized subject matter experts may be asked to assist in conducting these reviews. The “Special Features” section is edited by Associate Editor Lynn Harding.

Over the past 2 years, the typical time of submission to time of acceptance ranges from 3 to 6 months, largely pending author turnaround time for revisions. Once manuscripts are accepted, our goal is to publish in the upcoming or next issue of the journal. This publication turnaround time is normal-to-rapid in comparison to many other quarterly scientific journals. As Applied Biosafety matures, we are incorporating new capabilities to streamline our processes and provide better services. We are developing an online submission and tracking tool to better coordinate communications from the editors to the authors and reviewers. Additionally, we will be offering an electronic version of Applied Biosafety. This will be complimentary to the membership in the “Members Only” section of the web site and available for purchase on a dedicated secure site for ABSA nonmembers. Our objective is to provide relevant, timely, and easy-to-access information to those professionals who mitigate biological hazards, work with biologically hazardous materials, and comply with global biosafety and biosecurity requirements and guidelines.

Editorial Note

Letters to the Editors (approximately 400 words) discuss information published in Applied Biosafety in the past nine months or discuss topic areas of general interest in the biosafety profession. Letters can be submitted electronically to Karen D. Savage, Production Editor, at ksavage@covad.net or by mail to ABSA National Office, Applied Biosafety, 1202 Allanson Road, Mundelein, IL 60060-3808. Letters published in part or whole are subject to editing for clarity and special formatting.

Errata

Applied Biosafety regrets the misspelling of Enda Moran’s name in Volume 10, Number 1, 2005 (pages 30-39). He co-authored the article entitled “Biosafety for Large-Scale Containment Level 1 Operations Using Recombinant DNA Technology: No Emerging Hazards” with Richard Fink. Applied Biosafety apologizes for any inconvenience this may have caused.