Letter to the Editors

Andrew Hammond’s recent article published in *Applied Biosafety* (Volume 10, Number 4, 2005) entitled “Comparison of the Canadian Industrial Security Manual and the United States National Industrial Security Program Operating Manual,” was misleading in the association it created between “select” biological agents and classified information. The association is valid only for those classified programs that involve these agents, but statements made in the article seem to imply that those who hold Select Agents should be concerned about classification issues regardless of the nature of their program.

By stating that “much of the information surrounding the possession and use of these agents is potentially classified (or confidential)” (confidential is a U.S. category of classified information), Mr. Hammond overstates and muddles the issue. Select Agents may be dual-use; they have both peaceful civilian applications and the potential for being adapted for use as a weapon. The overwhelming majority of bioscience work in the U.S. with Select Agents is done in the public arena and includes exploring the fundamental biology of these agents as well as the development of medical countermeasures. The information generated by Select Agent use in the U.S. is therefore largely unclassified.

Mr. Hammond’s conclusions include the statement that “legislation is now in place that forbids the disclosure of information that may identify which biological agents are possessed, who possesses that agent(s) and where, and any safeguard and security measures used to protect unauthorized access to the agent(s).” The Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Act of 2002 does preclude certain Federal agencies from disclosing specific information about the registration and transfers of Select Agents. However, this prohibition is considerably narrower than what this statement implies; it does not apply to non-Federal organizations, and Mr. Hammond has incorrectly generalized the breadth of information addressed in the Act. Public disclosure of this type of information may be exempt from the Freedom of Information Act and thus limited in its dissemination, but it is generally not forbidden.

I appreciate Mr. Hammond’s efforts to elucidate the sometimes confusing labyrinth of regulations and vernacular associated with classified information. I simply wish that the article’s abstract, introduction, and conclusions had been more carefully crafted to make it clear that those who work with Select Agents, in the U.S. and outside of classified programs, are not subject to these types of regulations.

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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, via e-mail 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.

*Applied Biosafety’s New Ecological Format*

This issue would also have been 90 pages, but the format is condensed to present the same amount of information in 60 pages. We hope that this enhances *Applied Biosafety’s* professional appearance. It will also reduce printing and postage costs, and, by reducing the amount of paper used, save trees! Please share your thoughts on the new format (or any other aspect of the journal) with Karen D. Savage, Production Editor, via e-mail at ksavage@covad.net or by mail to ABSA National Office, *Applied Biosafety*, 1202 Allanson Road, Mundelein, IL 60060-3808.