This has been a busy spring and summer for ABSA. In May I was asked to represent ABSA at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta at a meeting entitled “Blue Ribbon Panel for Issues of Clinical Laboratory Safety.” Representatives from many clinical laboratories, from very small hospitals to very large medical centers, as well as clinical laboratory corporations and representatives from CDC were in attendance. Among the topics discussed were laboratory-acquired infections (LAIs). Currently, these incidents are often noted only anecdotally, making it impossible to determine the full extent of the problem. CDC recognizes the need to assess the extent of LAIs and to identify opportunities to acquire relevant data without being punitive. Enhancing biosafety training and practices in clinical laboratories was also discussed. A draft report has been issued, and when it is finalized, we will all hear more on this topic.

The Summer Seminar Series and Certification Review Course were held in Baltimore in June, and both were quite successful. We hope that quite a few people will pass the upcoming certification exam in biosafety, which will now be administered on-line by the National Registry of Microbiologists (NRM). This year, it will be offered throughout the month of October, rather than only at the ABSA conference. Individuals wishing to take the exam must apply to NRM, and will be able to take the exam at a testing center near their place of residence. Results will not be instantaneous; however, as ABSA’s Exam Development Committee will still do a blind review of the exam questions and answers prior to NRM informing candidates of their scores.

To increase communication to our membership, we now publish a quarterly newsletter that is sent by e-mail to all members. The first one was sent out on July 17. Each quarter, you will see brief reports from the Council teams, and committees that have news to share. Please let us know if you have any suggestions or would like to see additional information. And if the newsletter sparks questions, please do not hesitate to contact ABSA.

In the last edition of Applied Biosafety (Volume 13, Number 2, 2008), I reported that in April 2008 ABSA made a presentation to the Trans-Federal Task Force on Optimizing Biosafety Oversight in Washington, DC. As a follow-up to that meeting, we have begun to bring together stakeholders to talk about creating a laboratory accreditation process. Please read the ABSA position paper on laboratory accreditation that is posted on our web site. We have begun discussions with representatives from several organizations, including ASM, AALAS, AAALAC, OSHA, USDA, and CDC. We will be deciding on next steps in the upcoming months and will be seeking funding to pursue this effort. As was mentioned before, we believe that ABSA is uniquely positioned and qualified to lead this effort. We propose to base the accreditation program on the CEN Workshop Agreement 15793 Laboratory Biorisk Management Standard and current technical standards such as BMBL and the NIH Recombinant DNA Guidelines.

Additionally, ABSA had been invited to participate in the 2008 Meeting of Experts of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) August 18-22, 2008 in Geneva, Switzerland. The topics discussed at this meeting were:

- National, regional, and international measures to improve biosafety and biosecurity, including laboratory safety and security of pathogens and toxins.
- Oversight, education, raising awareness, and adoption and/or development of codes of conduct to prevent misuse of advances in bio-science and bio-technology research that have the potential to be used for purposes prohibited by the Convention.

ABSA has been asked to brief participants on our activities as well our views about the most beneficial approach to, and constructive concepts of, biosafety and biosecurity.

One of the goals of the ABSA Council over the past several years has been to raise our visibility and our voice in all matters concerning biosafety. The invitations we have received over the past few months to give our input at meetings such as the Trans-Federal Task Force on Optimizing Biosafety Oversight, the CDC Blue Ribbon Panel for Issues of Clinical Laboratory Safety, and the BWC demonstrate that we are on the radar screens of major government agencies and international bodies. We will do everything we can to ensure that this continues, so that the biosafety community and ABSA influence legislative and policy developments.