Letter to the Editors

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I read with interest the article by Turnbull et al. in Applied Biosafety (Volume 13, Number 3, 2008). The use of ultraviolet light, specifically 254 nm radiation (UVC), has been considered by many in the biosafety community to be a high-risk, low-value disinfecting agent. Their paper is a clear reminder of both the utility and the limits of using UV to disinfect solid materials against biological organisms, including spores.

However, in reading the paper, one reference needs clarification. The paper cites an anonymous ABSA position paper which, the authors conclude, indicates that ABSA recommends “…that UV lights within a biological safety cabinet are neither recommended nor required.” This document, which has also circulated on the ABSA Biosafety web server, is not an official ABSA document. It is one of two papers published in Applied Biosafety arguing for and against such a position. The “anonymous” article was actually written by Jyl Burgener. Christina Wilson and I authored the paper opposing such a move. ABSA has, to date, recognized the wisdom of allowing organizations and institutions to use their best judgment in determining when and where UV can be used and whether it is, as part of their risk assessment, a useful adjunct to disinfect items, including biosafety cabinets.

As for NSF49 adopting such language, it should be noted that all major BSC manufacturers still provide UV lamps as an option. Most now have implemented the recommendations that Ms. Wilson and I made in 2006 by interlocking the UV source and the sash and allowing the UV lamp to be regulated by a timer. The change in language in NSF49 has also eliminated the routine evaluation of UV fluence during annual recertification. That loss will make it less likely that the UV sources in BSCs will maintain their efficacy without additional work by the end-users. It is my opinion that such a change has not been in the best interest of the biosafety community and the researchers we serve. Laboratories that continue to use UV sources will need to insist that their recertifiers continue to check their UV sources, as visual inspection of the source is not a sufficient check on 254 nm output.

Thank you for allowing this clarification to be distributed.

References


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ABSA thanks the many of you who have generously contributed to the Richard C. Knudsen Memorial Fund. Richard Knudsen was a President of ABSA and Editor of Applied Biosafety. The proceeds from this fund are used annually to recognize an author who’s article in Applied Biosafety contributes to the scientific body of knowledge in biosafety. Those wishing to make donations to this fund should make their checks payable to the American Biological Safety Association. Please add a notation to the memo line that the check is to be used for the Richard C. Knudsen Memorial Fund. Checks should be mailed to ABSA, 1200 Allanson Road, Mundelein, Illinois 60060-3808.