PRESIDENT’S PAGE

Where were you when you first heard the phrase “biological safety”? For me, it was 1982 and I was in a laboratory trying to persuade strains of Micromonospora to produce more gentamicin. My company was beginning to use gene cloning to manufacture pharmaceutical products and they needed someone to be a biological safety officer. How about you? If you are more experienced than 1, you were probably influenced by the pioneering work of Arnold Wedum in the 1950s. Those new to biological safety may highlight OSHA’s Bloodborne Pathogens Standard as their critical event.

All of us can probably trace our involvement in biological safety to some significant occurrence. What has happened since? Is your current knowledge a deep rooted understanding of the risks posed by biological hazards and the applicable control measures? If not, I hope this is your goal. Biological safety is more than applying the correct section of the NIH Guidelines, confining aerosol-producing activities to a biological safety cabinet or donning latex gloves when handling human blood. It is a thorough understanding of the reservoirs of biohazardous risk and the controls that are needed to eliminate occupational illness and adverse environmental consequences.

Recently, the ABSA Committee on Certification Development enumerated over five dozen tasks in seven areas of core competency for biological safety: hazard identification and risk assessment; program management and development; regulations, standards and guidelines; facility design; work practices and procedures; equipment operation and certification; and disinfection, decontamination and sterilization. Our individual professional development plans should be aimed at a mastery of these tasks and each core competency. To do so, I suggest a three-fold strategy:

1. Build the Bench: This sports image portrays our need to continuously increase the pool of recognized experts. This will establish a “brain trust” that ABSA and other organizations can rely upon for guidance. ABSA offers two opportunities to do this—the Registered Biological Safety Professional and Certified Biological Safety Professional programs. All who qualify should participate in both.
2. Learn for a Lifetime: During the next year, commit to attending one continuing education course offered by ABSA or others to expand your knowledge of a biological safety niche that is unfamiliar to you.
3. Share Success: Share your knowledge and success stories by submitting at least one article to JABSA that relates to your area of biological safety expertise.

Excellence in biological safety is critical if we are to achieve our goal of preventing occupational illness and environmental contamination. This can be achieved only through a process based on continuous improvement. We must constantly learn, challenge and share.

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