

ABSA

American Biological Safety Association



A message from the ABSA Council regarding Laboratory Accreditation

Dear ABSA Members,

At the ABSA conference in Reno, Council members received feedback and questions from the membership regarding our efforts in laboratory accreditation. Due to concurrent sessions, at least half the attendees did not attend the roundtables on “Biosafety on the Horizon” or “Institutional Biosafety Committee Roundtable: The Basics, Best Practices and Beyond.” Because of the questions and comments we have received during and after the conference, the Council wants to offer background information and further explanation of our current pursuits.

First of all, Council has been discussing accreditation of high containment laboratories (BSL-3 and BSL-4) for several years. We had begun drafting our position paper on laboratory accreditation early in 2008. That position paper is posted on the ABSA home page. Coincidentally, we were asked to participate in a meeting of the Trans-Federal Task Force on Optimizing Biosafety Oversight on April 15 of this year. At that meeting, we presented our position on accreditation.

Due to proposed legislation in both the House and Senate, and from information from government agencies, we know that some form of laboratory oversight is coming. The question is: Would you rather have government regulation and inspection or industry standards created and implemented by biosafety professionals? We think the answer is clear: If ABSA as an organization develops an accreditation program, it can be done in a way that we believe is technically superior to anything the government will develop. Surely it will be less costly and less burdensome to our members and to researchers in infectious diseases who must conduct their work in high containment facilities.

After the Trans-Federal Task Force meeting, we initiated a discussion on laboratory accreditation with external stakeholders. The organizations that participated in our initial discussion were ASM, AALAS, and AAALAC. The government agencies represented included NIH, CDC, USDA, and OSHA. We realize that there are additional organizations that we need to bring into our discussions in order to do this correctly.

After the discussion with stakeholders, the ABSA Council appointed a task force on laboratory accreditation in late summer. The charge of this task force is to investigate and develop a plan for an ABSA-managed accreditation program for high containment laboratories (BSL-3 and BSL-4). We are planning to generate a voluntary system, but we are only at the beginning of the process. We are not exactly sure how it will be run in the end, but the

intention is for ABSA members to be involved. The Laboratory Accreditation Program is not intended to be a revenue producer for ABSA; on the contrary, it will cost us money to get started, and we will seek outside funding to help defray expenses. The Laboratory Accreditation Program will develop into a self-sustaining program, and thus will necessarily charge enough for accreditation to fully cover administrative costs. Nevertheless, we believe it is necessary to begin this effort and to let members of Congress and government agencies know what we are doing, and what we think will work best.

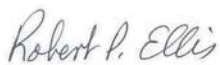
The members of the Laboratory Accreditation Task Force are:

Chris Thompson, Task Force Chair and Immediate Past President of ABSA
Bob Ellis, Colorado State University and Current ABSA President
Bob Hawley, Midwest Research Institute and Past President of ABSA
Dee Zimmerman, UTMB and Galveston National Laboratory
Bill Homovec, LabCorp
Jack Keene, Biosafety Consultant and Past President of ABSA
Rob Heckert, Biosafety Consultant
Ed Stygar III, ABSA Executive Director
Ed Stygar Jr., Past ABSA Executive Director and previous executive of several accreditation programs

This task force will report to Council on a regular basis, at least monthly, and will report in the quarterly electronic newsletter. The task force will seek Council approval for all actions. The task force also will continue to engage external stakeholders to make sure that we are all in agreement on anything that will affect our researchers, so that important research on infectious diseases will not be impeded.

Members' comments are solicited and are most welcome. Please watch for our reports to the membership in the newsletter. Please feel free to contact any of us on the task force or any Council member if you have concerns or questions about the activities of the Laboratory Accreditation Task Force.

Sincerely,



Robert Ellis
President, ABSA



Christina Thompson
Chair, ABSA Accreditation Task Force