National Biosafety Month

From: Colin Parrish, Keith Perry and Esther Angert, Co-Chairs, Cornell Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) and Alexis Brubaker, Institutional Biosafety Officer

The National Biosafety Awareness Month is a time to review what we can do to safeguard our lab space, our colleagues, and the environment against contamination with recombinant or biohazardous materials. Accidental releases of such materials due to careless or inappropriate handling, storage or disposal methods can lead to significant harm to our safety and to the environment. Such accidents can also be costly in terms of real dollars, time, research outcomes and reputation, for both the affected individuals and the institution.

In our last communication, we provided some links to existing resources to increase your awareness of biosafety best practices. Click here for the newsletter. This time, we have specific recommendations for things you can do to assess and improve safety in your lab spaces. But first, some more biosafety humor, this time on YouTube!

A short video from University of Minnesota (2:30 mins)
Lab Wars from Mississippi State University (12:25 mins)

1. **Inventory the biohazardous materials in your lab:** Take a few minutes to make sure that you know the biohazards (and chemicals, while you are at it!) in your lab, and that safety information on those materials is available to all lab members.

   You can use one of the many commercial inventory products such as [Quartzy](https://quartzy.com) or just use a simple Excel spreadsheet with the following template as a guide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freezer or Cryotank ID</th>
<th>Shelf #</th>
<th>Rack #</th>
<th>Box #</th>
<th>Number of vials</th>
<th>Description of Contents</th>
<th>Concentration or Titer</th>
<th>Volumes</th>
<th>Date Box Created</th>
<th>Users/Owners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. **Review your Memorandum of Understanding and Agreement (MUA):** The materials, experimental procedures, SOPs for handling and disposal, emergency procedures, and the people who can work with those materials are approved by the Cornell IBC and are described in an MUA. Make sure a copy of the MUA is posted in your lab for all research staff to review or ask your PI for a copy if you don’t have it. For questions about the IBC or your MUA, contact Deb Dwyer in the IBC office at 607-255-7219 or [cu_ibc@cornell.edu](mailto:cu_ibc@cornell.edu)

3. **Take a minute for safety:** At the beginning of your lab meeting, take a minute to review some common safety practices. These “Safety Moments” slides or case studies in #5 below are good sources for ideas and inspiration!

4. **Activate the Eye Wash in your lab:** A working eye wash can be critical to preventing long term eye damage in case of a splash. Make sure that yours is working correctly, today! Simply turn on the water and allow it to run for 3 minutes. Post an [Eye Wash Testing Sheet](https://example.com) near the eyewash to document weekly testing and know the procedures on [Proper Use of an Eye Wash](https://example.com).

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5. **Interactive case studies:** Cornell’s Biosafety team has put together these four case studies that mirror closely the kind of work that you are likely to encounter at Cornell. These interactive case studies can be used quite effectively in a group lab setting. Your responses are not tracked, so feel free to explore the various options provided in the case studies. We welcome your feedback on these case studies and hope that you find them useful.

   Case Study 1: **Pop Goes the Vortex Tube**  A vortex tube containing *E. coli* O157:H7 breaks and splashes a student’s face. What to do now?
   Case Study 2: **Cell Phones and Lab Work, Oh My!**  A student is culturing an unknown material and touching his/her cell phone and ear buds. What can you do if you observe a fellow student using their cell phone while handling biohazardous materials?
   Case Study 3: **Skeletons in the Freezer**  What to do if you find a select agent stock in the lab freezer?
   Case Study 4: **What Gets Recycled?**  Petri dishes in the recycling bin! What are the rules? What to do?

Biosafety professionals in [Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) AskEHS@cornell.edu](mailto:AskEHS@cornell.edu) and the [IBC cu. ibc@cornell.edu](mailto:cu. ibc@cornell.edu) are always happy to talk with you or to answer any questions about biosafety practices in your lab. Contact them early when you are thinking about a project and anytime during the project for biosafety guidance or resources.