

Health and Safety Executive Board		Paper No: MISC/08/15	
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<b>PUBLICATION OF THE INNOVATION, UNIVERSITIES, SCIENCE AND SKILL (IUSS) COMMITTEE REPORT INTO BIOSECURITY IN UK RESEARCH LABORATORIES</b>			

## Purpose of the paper

1. To alert the Board to the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills (IUSS) Committee's report on this subject, published on 25 June. The report concludes there are shortcomings in the UK's capacity for high containment research and recommends areas for further action.

## Background

2. Several reviews into biosecurity were undertaken following confirmation that the most likely cause of the foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak in Surrey arose from an accidental release of virus from a laboratory. The review on the future regulation of biosecurity risks was led by Sir Bill Callaghan. This generated a number of recommendations, which were all accepted by Government. As a result, HSE is now the regulator for specified animal pathogens in England. In addition, HSE and Defra are continuing to work together on a single framework to regulate deliberate work with human and animal pathogens.

3. The IUSS Committee's inquiry, announced on 6 December 2007, sought to identify any generic lessons from the outbreak and whether any further action is necessary to prevent a reoccurrence in the future. The review received 45 written responses and held three oral evidence sessions. HSE provided two witnesses for the scientific and technical evidence session and provided technical support to Lord McKenzie at the final session.

## Argument

4. The Committee views the new regulatory framework as a positive step which will help researchers to continue their work to protect the UK from the threat of infectious disease. It holds the view that a number of UK laboratories dealing with highly dangerous pathogens such as FMD have been neglected. While some are world-class, it considers that some are in need of significant investment and even for some Containment Level 4 laboratories there are shortcomings in funding for ongoing maintenance.

5. Other key findings are:

- a lack of co-ordination between organisations who sponsor and run high containment laboratories;
- no one organisation or Minister has the remit to maintain a strategic overview of capacity and co-ordination; and

- current Ministers have never met to discuss the issue of biosecurity.

6. The Committee's recommendations include:

- setting up an inter-agency body for strategic planning and coordination of those facilities dealing with the highest risk pathogens;
- having long-term funding to cover running costs at all sites;
- having a single Minister to take responsibility for co-ordinating biosecurity;
- the Government presenting a report to Parliament every two years on the UK's readiness in the face of the threat posed by dangerous pathogens;
- Government vetting procedures to be used at all CL4 laboratories; and
- training courses to ensure basic common standards to be introduced for those handling dangerous pathogens.

An inter-Departmental group is considering the Government's response to the Committee's conclusions and recommendations. HSE officials are involved as there are several recommendations that specifically mention HSE. The response is due in September and we will consult the Board as necessary.

### **Action**

7. No action required at present, for information only.

### **Paper clearance**

8. This paper was produced by Stephen Kinghorn-Perry and was cleared by Giles Denham and Geoffrey Podger.

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