

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Office of Research and Development**

**BOARD OF SCIENTIFIC COUNSELORS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
CONFERENCE CALL**

**January 5, 1998**

Shirley Hamilton (EPA) reminded the Executive Committee members that hotel reservations for the January 27-28, 1998 Board of Scientific Counselors (BOSC) Meeting should be made by January 6, 1998; after this date reservations may be made on a space-available basis. In response to a participant's question, Costel Denson (University of Delaware) indicated that the meeting agenda has not yet been distributed, but he agreed to provide it to Shirley Hamilton for circulation to the Executive Committee. Dr. Denson reminded the Executive Committee that the objective of today's conference call is to discuss the *Review of the National Exposure Research Laboratory* working document and the *Review of the National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory* working document. He encouraged Executive Committee members to comment on the two documents.

**Discussion of the Review of the National Exposure Research Laboratory Working Document**

Jerald Schnoor (University of Iowa) indicated that the Executive Committee members who participated in the Summer 1997 site visit to the National Exposure Research Laboratory (NERL) were favorably impressed with the Laboratory. Dr. Schnoor led the discussion on the recommendations included in the report. The comments are presented below.

***Recommendation 1: NERL needs to develop and implement a strategic plan.*** Dr. Schnoor noted that although a strategic plan was referenced by NERL staff, the Laboratory was not able to produce a copy of the plan, nor did Laboratory staff believe that a strategic plan was being implemented. Brian Leaderer (Yale University) agreed with this recommendation, and pointed out the importance of integration of the strategic plan with ORD's mission and with the roles of the other EPA Laboratories. Bill Pierson (Desert Research Institute) suggested that Recommendation 1 be divided into two separate recommendations—the first two sentences could form one recommendation and the remainder could form a second recommendation. It was mentioned that Joseph LeBeau (Dow; retired), who participated in the site visit, noted that a high percentage of staff was devoted to administrative tasks. Dr. Schnoor responded that NERL staff were receptive to a reduction of the percentage of administrative staff. Marilyn Brown (Oak Ridge National Laboratory) mentioned that the situation was similar at the National Center for Environmental Research and Quality Assurance (NCERQA).

***Recommendation 2: NERL personnel need to fully understand and maintain a high level of commitment to ORD's reorganization and Strategic Plan for several years if it is to be ultimately successful.*** Dr. Schnoor indicated that the administrators exhibited a lack of commitment to ORD policy changes. The administrators appeared to believe that the changes implemented by ORD may be modified again in the future; therefore, strict adherence to them was not necessary. A number of Executive Committee members noted that this sentiment also was apparent at other ORD Laboratories/Centers. It was agreed to use the phrase "skills enhancement" in place of "re-train" in the third sentence. A number of Executive Committee members commented on Recommendation 2.3, and requested that additional information be provided on "team-based research." Interactions with academia and industry are critical to achieving ORD's vision, and a participant suggested that interactions with these groups be further encouraged.

***Recommendation 3: Travel funds available to researchers should be sufficient to support the ORD scientific mission and lead to training and professional development.*** The Executive Committee recognized that NERL staff

must attend symposia and other national meetings to fully interact with the scientific community. However, the level of allocated travel funding has been an issue for many years. The Executive Committee agreed to add stronger verbage to Recommendation 3 to stress the importance of adequate travel funding.

**Recommendation 4: There needs to be improved communications within NERL, both from the bottom-up and especially from the top-down.** The Executive Committee agreed to move relevant aspects of Recommendation 2 to Recommendation 4. NERL staff did not believe there was adequate communication between staff and upper management.

**Recommendation 5: NERL should consider how the Laboratory can contribute to new and developing concepts of sustainable development, industrial ecology, and pollution prevention.** The Executive Committee indicated that NERL should be more involved with sustainable development. Dr. Brown suggested that this recommendation be expanded to include the National Risk Management Research Laboratory (NRMRL), as it would be appropriate for NERL to provide input to NRMRL on this matter.

**Recommendation 6: In this era of shrinking budgets and increased accountability, NERL's efforts to establish partnerships with academia and industry should be applauded.** Dr. Schnoor noted that NERL was doing well in this area and should be encouraged to continue its efforts. In response to a participant's question, Ms. Hamilton indicated that she will circulate an ORD policy transmittal to the Executive Committee clarifying researchers' opportunities to interact with others.

**Recommendation 7: In the future, NERL needs a greater proportion of new EPA positions relative to other Laboratories and Centers.** NERL's level of funding has decreased by 30 percent over the past few years. The Executive Committee agreed to add "if it is to meet its objectives" to the end of the last sentence of the recommendation. Robert Howarth (Cornell University) suggested that the phrase "relative to other Laboratories and Centers" be rephrased to remove the comparison between NERL and other ORD Laboratories and Centers.

Dr. Schnoor requested an electronic copy of the NERL working document and Ms. Hamilton agreed to provide it to him.

### **Discussion of the Review of the National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory Working Document**

The National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory (NHEERL) is the largest ORD Laboratory. The Executive Committee noted that the role of the Assistant Laboratory Directors (ALDs) at NERL is different from that of the ALDs at NHEERL. ALDs and support for the ALDs are sensitive issues, but the ALDs are well regarded by all ORD Laboratories. The Executive Committee noted some disconnect between the ALDs and the Laboratory staff. The Executive Committee agreed that clarification of the role and support network for the ALDs was important, as is improved communication between the ALDs and the Laboratory staff.

**Conclusion/Recommendation D. Organization and Management.** The Executive Committee found no fundamental flaws in the management structure of NHEERL. Rae Zimmerman (New York University) agreed to add language to better integrate the health and ecology divisions of the managerial organization. The Executive Committee agreed that there is a need to strengthen communication between managers and support staff.

**Conclusion/Recommendation E. Sufficiency and Utilization of Resources.** The Executive Committee agreed to include a statement regarding the Science to Achieve Results (STAR) program. Many NHEERL staff believe that the STAR Program created a barrier that limited interaction between NHEERL staff and the STAR grantees. The Executive Committee indicated that if the administrative hurdles were removed, then an opportunity would exist to leverage resources.

**Conclusion/Recommendation G. Performance.** It was suggested that the BOSC develop a performance marker.

It was noted that NHEERL is faced with the significant challenge of integrating ecological and health aspects, and the Executive Committee recognized that NHEERL is working diligently on this effort. Dr. Zimmerman agreed to provide Ginni Boyd (SCG) with a revised draft of the NHEERL working document. In response to his request, Ms. Hamilton will send to Michael Kavanaugh (Malcolm Pirnie, Inc.) a listing of e-mail addresses for the Executive Committee members. Ms. Hamilton reminded the Executive Committee that the next conference call has been scheduled for Monday, January 12, 1998, from 2:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. (EST).

### **Action Items**

- Costel Denson will send the January 27-28, 1998 BOSC Executive Committee Meeting agenda to Shirley Hamilton for circulation to the Executive Committee.
- Shirley Hamilton will provide Jerald Schnoor an electronic copy of the NERL working document.
- Rae Zimmerman will provide Ginni Boyd with a revised draft of the NHEERL working document.
- Shirley Hamilton will send to Michael Kavanaugh a listing of e-mail addresses for the Executive Committee members.

### **Participants List**

The following Executive Committee members were present on the conference call:

Marilyn Brown	Robert Howarth	William Pierson
Thomas Burke	Michael Kavanaugh	Jerald Schnoor
James Bus	Brian Leaderer	Mitchell Small
Costel Denson	Raymond Loehr	Rae Zimmerman

Additional Participants:

Shirley Hamilton (Designated Federal Official)  
Mark Searles (SCG)