

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

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

**January 12, 1998**

Costel Denson (University of Delaware) reminded the Executive Committee members that the objective of today's conference call is to discuss the *Review of the National Risk Management Research Laboratory* working document and the *Review of the National Center for Environmental Assessment* working document. Dr. Denson encouraged Committee members to provide comments regarding either working document.

**Discussion of the Review of the National Risk Management Research Laboratory Working Document**

Brian Leaderer (Yale University) led a discussion of the *Review of the National Risk Management Research Laboratory (NRMRL)* working document. Dr. Leaderer indicated that NRMRL personnel were very cooperative during the site visit conducted by the *Ad Hoc* Review Committee. Rae Zimmerman (New York University) suggested that the conclusions in the working document be rewritten in a more positive tone. Dr. Leaderer indicated that Section 5 (Break-Out Sessions), has been modified to express a less negative tone; he agreed to revisit the conclusions as well, and to circulate the revised Section 5 to the Executive Committee. Dr. Denson mentioned that he has reviewed the revised section, and believes that it was improved appreciably. Dr. Zimmerman asked if discussion of the break-out sessions should be included in the report as a separate section. The Executive Committee agreed that discussion of the break-out sessions may be included in the report as a separate section, but names of individuals within each session may not be included. Incorporation of the break-out sessions was left to the discretion of the author.

Dr. Leaderer provided a brief synopsis of each of the recommendations. The Executive Committee's comments are provided below.

***Recommendation 1: A NRMRL mission statement should be developed that provides specific guidance and clearly delineates NRMRL's role within the new ORD structure.*** The recommendation suggests that a NRMRL mission statement should be developed. The Executive Committee noted that the other working documents have a similar recommendation.

***Recommendation 2: A greater amount of external peer review of the overall ORD research agenda needs to occur in order to insure that activities are coordinated between the various ORD Laboratories.*** A number of Executive Committee members believed that it was inappropriate to critique ORD from within the review of a single Laboratory. Instead, it was suggested to include this recommendation in a summary report that provides general comments; Dr. Denson agreed to do so.

***Recommendation 7: Develop a comprehensive management information system that permits tracking of time and resource allocation with respect to all five mission areas. Specifically, all hours and equipment usage should be attributable to a specific project. We recommend using a private sector model to track relevant information on Laboratory activities. (This needs to be instituted for all ORD Laboratories, but perhaps NRMRL could be a test site for this program).*** Dr. Leaderer indicated that NRMRL staff had a poor idea of how resources were being used. Although Executive Committee members agreed that time and resources should be tracked, they cautioned that management information systems are often difficult to implement. Dr. Leaderer clarified that it is not intended to be an impediment, rather it is intended to provide fundamental information so that level of effort expended on an individual project may be determined.

**Recommendation 10:** *An ongoing systematic program is needed to identify the discrepancy between the current mix of skills and the mix of skills needed for NRMRL to meet its objectives.* It was agreed to incorporate Recommendation 10 into Recommendation 8.

**Recommendation 11:** *The Director of NRMRL should convey a clear message to the staff regarding the two paths that professional staff can pursue under the new ORD agenda and Strategic Plan. Based upon the Subcommittee's understanding of NRMRL's mission, some staff will pursue original research while others will be involved in conducting cost-benefit analyses that characterize the impact of new regulatory initiatives or classic engineering control technologies.* The Executive Committee agreed to use a term other than "cost-benefit," which was considered too restrictive.

**Recommendation 12:** *Develop a detailed career development plan for each member of the professional staff that would incorporate a formal mentoring and skills enhancement program.* It was agreed to modify "each member" because it suggested that professional staff should be required to develop a career plan. The Executive Committee agreed that development of a career plan should be optional.

**Recommendation 13:** *Develop an effective rewards program that encourages a desire to pursue research. Rewards that should be given consideration include building new Laboratories, increased access to post-doctorate researchers, travel to scientific meetings, sabbaticals, and other similar incentives.* The Executive Committee noted that no clear rewards system exists, and the Committee believes it would be beneficial to implement one. It was agreed to revise the first sentence to read, "... a desire to conduct research consistent with NRMRL's mission."

**Recommendation 14:** *The internal grants program needs to be modified to insure that the awardees have adequate facilities, equipment, and staff to conduct the research in-house which now, by necessity, must be done by external contractors.* This recommendation notes that some internal grants at NRMRL are, in effect, being performed by external contractors. The Executive Committee believes that this was inconsistent with an internal grant. Several Executive Committee members suggested revising the last sentence to read, "... to conduct the research in-house." However, consensus was not reached. Dr. Leaderer agreed to revise the recommendation, and discuss the specific wording with the Executive Committee members offline.

Ginni Boyd (SCG) agreed to incorporate the Executive Committee's modifications to the working documents by January 20, 1998. Copies of the revised working documents then will be circulated to the Executive Committee. Ms. Boyd indicated that to meet the January 20 deadline, the Executive Committee members must provide all modifications to her at least several days prior to that date. Dr. Denson reminded the Executive Committee members that the agenda for the January 27-28, 1998 BOSC Meeting includes 90 minutes for discussion of each report.

### **Discussion of the Review of the National Center for Environmental Assessment Working Document**

A number of similarities exist between this working document and those for the other Laboratories and Centers. One Executive Committee member believes that the National Center for Environmental Assessment (NCEA) needs to bolster its ecological risk assessment and its ecological health assessment capabilities. The recommendations are excerpted from the text; readers should refer to the text for additional context. The Executive Committee members reviewed each of the recommendations and there was only one comment that required any action:

**Recommendation 18:** *Implement a mentoring and skills enhancement program.* The Executive Committee agreed with the recommendation, but there was some concern regarding who would serve as mentors. One member suggested that this concern be incorporated into the summary report.

Dr. Denson applauded the efforts of the Executive Committee, noting that the working documents have been prepared in a short timeframe.

### **Action Items**

- Brian Leaderer will circulate the revised Section 5 from the NRMRL working document to the Executive Committee for review and comment.
- Ginni Boyd will incorporate modifications to the working documents and provide copies by January 20, 1998. Adherence to this deadline is contingent upon receipt of the Executive Committee members' modifications prior to January 20, 1998.
- Ginni Boyd will circulate copies of the revised working documents to the Executive Committee.

### **Participants**

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

James Bus	Brian Leaderer
William Cooper	William Pierson
Costel Denson	Jerald Schnoor
Robert Howarth	Mitchell Small
Michael Kavanaugh	Rae Zimmerman

Additional Participants:

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