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Contact: HHS Press Office
202-690-6343

HHS WILL LEAD GOVERNMENT-WIDE EFFORT TO ENHANCE BIOSECURITY IN "DUAL USE" RESEARCH

New Advisory Board Established To Provide Guidance

HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson today announced that HHS will lead a government-wide effort to put in place improved biosecurity measures for classes of legitimate biological research that could be misused to threaten public health or national security—so-called "dual use" research.

As a first step in this process, Secretary Thompson announced the creation of the National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity (NSABB). The new board will advise all Federal departments and agencies that conduct or support life sciences research that could fall into the "dual use" category. The NSABB will be managed by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

"Our nation has been a world leader in life sciences research because of our emphasis on the importance of the free flow of scientific inquiry. Yet, sadly, the very same tools developed to better the health and condition of humankind can also be used for its destruction," Secretary Thompson said. "For the health and security of our nation, we must take the needed steps to improve biosecurity measures for this type of research. But in so doing, we must protect our open process of scientific discovery that has been the linchpin of our research success."

The NSABB will advise the Secretary of HHS, the director of NIH, and the heads of all federal departments and agencies that conduct or support life sciences research. The board will advise on and recommend specific strategies for the efficient and effective oversight of federally conducted or supported potential dual-use biological research taking into consideration both national security concerns and the needs of the research community.

"This is an important issue that requires greater awareness and education among people working in bioscience," said John H. Marburger III, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. "Creating the NSABB is a major step in a longer process of outreach and education to scientists in the United States and internationally. It is imperative that we develop this new framework to address serious concerns that range from personal responsibility to national security."

Specifically, the NSABB will:

- advise on strategies for local and federal biosecurity oversight for all federally funded or supported life sciences research.
- advise on the development of guidelines for biosecurity oversight of life sciences research and provide ongoing evaluation and modification of these guidelines as needed.

- advise on strategies to work with journal editors and other stakeholders to ensure the development of guidelines for the publication, public presentation, and public communication of potentially sensitive life sciences research.
- advise on the development of guidelines for mandatory programs for education and training in biosecurity issues for all life scientists and laboratory workers at federally-funded institutions.
- provide guidance on the development of a code of conduct for life scientists and laboratory workers that can be adopted by federal agencies as well as professional organizations and institutions engaged in the performance of life sciences research domestically and internationally.

"We are implementing a system that satisfies both national security concerns and the need to continue cutting-edge research that improves our health and our lives," said John Gordon, the President's Homeland Security Advisor.

The need for additional oversight in this arena was highlighted in a recent report by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences on "Biotechnology Research in an Age of Terrorism: Confronting the Dual Use Dilemma."

"The NRC report addressed a timely and significant issue in life sciences research. We believe the NSABB will help guide us in working with the life sciences research and publishing communities in establishing effective and efficient measures that will accomplish many of the objectives envisioned in the report," said NIH director, Elias A. Zerhouni, M.D. "Our extensive experience at NIH with the Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee (RAC) served us well in designing the NSABB as a public forum for discussion of all aspects of dual use research and the development of national guidelines and principles for the safe and ethical conduct of this research. The active participation of the scientific community, here and abroad, will promote a culture of responsibility among researchers in this arena of science, much as we have seen with the field of recombinant DNA research."

Working with the Department of State and other relevant agencies, HHS also will lead the Administration's efforts to foster the extension of these biosecurity policies to the international arena on a voluntary and cooperative basis, working through existing international scientific and health organizations, and other relevant international organizations.

The NSABB will have up to 25 voting members, to be appointed by the HHS Secretary in consultation with the heads of relevant federal departments and agencies. Members will be experts in a broad range of fields, including molecular biology, microbiology, infectious diseases, laboratory biosafety and biosecurity, public health/epidemiology, health physics, pharmaceutical production, veterinary medicine, plant health, food production, bioethics, national security, biodefense, intelligence, law and law enforcement, and scientific publishing. The Board will also include nonvoting *ex officio* members from at least 15 federal departments and agencies.

Additional information on the NSABB is available at www.biosecurityboard.gov or http://www4.od.nih.gov/nsabb/.

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