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September 5, 2007

The Honorable John Dingell/Chairman and  
The Honorable Bart Stupak/Subcommittee Chairman  
The House/Committee on  
Energy and Commerce

Dear Representatives Dingell and Stupak –

The American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians (AAVLD) noted with interest your news release announcing plans for hearings in October regarding the examination of risks associated with biosafety level III (BSL3) and IV (BSL4) laboratories in the United States. We would like to testify at these hearings.

The AAVLD is a nationwide diagnostic laboratory association with over 1300 members employed in over 43 government-affiliated accredited laboratories. Our services assist livestock producers, pet owners, veterinarians, wildlife managers and public health professionals in every state everyday. We provide surveillance and diagnostics for foreign animal diseases, emerging diseases, and/or diseases that could be considered bioterrorist threats such as anthrax, plague, tularemia and Q-Fever. These latter diseases do occur commonly in many of our states.

AAVLD accredited laboratories are also members of the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) system, a partnership between AAVLD and the USDA. The basic mission of the NAHLN is surveillance, early detection, response to and recovery from any foreign animal or emerging disease. Current programs in the NAHLN include surveillance for bovine spongiform encephalopathy, chronic wasting diseases, scrapie, exotic Newcastle disease, avian influenza, and classical swine fever. Shortly, foot and mouth disease surveillance will be added to this system.

AAVLD Laboratories, as members of the NAHLN, and in our daily diagnostic capacity, must be able to handle these disease agents safely. Our BSL3 facilities serve a dual purpose not only allowing safe handling of diagnostic materials but also the pursuit of knowledge to enhance diagnostic capabilities through research, as many AAVLD laboratories are also in Colleges of Veterinary Medicine.

Before a BSL3 laboratory can be certified as ready to use, or “commissioned”, it must go through a rigorous set of checks. Many BSL3 laboratories are also registered for work with “select agents” (agents of potential bioterrorist use). This registration process includes inspections by both CDC and USDA to ensure that all the safety precautions for general security, as well as biosecurity, are met. Furthermore, laboratories accredited by the AAVLD undergo regular on-site inspections. Additionally, many AAVLD laboratories are further inspected under the NAHLN system by USDA. These oversight measures ensure that AAVLD laboratories are secure and safe, and we encourage this continued practice of inspections and audits.

We would like to emphasize, however, that the ability to have the BSL3 space is of critical need for AAVLD laboratories to be able to detect early and respond to any potential emerging disease, foreign animal disease outbreak or any bioterrorist event. Therefore, we sincerely hope that the oversight committee will carefully consider the need for AAVLD Laboratories to maintain their BSL3 space to assist in the protection of the nation’s food supply and public health.

Many members of your committee do have AAVLD laboratories in their states and we would certainly welcome a site visit by those who may be interested in seeing the security currently practiced in BSL3 laboratories. We are available to respond to any of your questions and request an invitation to speak at your hearings in October.

Sincerely,



Barb Powers, DVM/PhD/DAVCP  
President/AAVLD

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