National Institutes of Health

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Date: October 1, 2015

From: Carrie D. Wolinetz, Ph.D., Associate Director for Science Policy, NIH

To: Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) Chairs
Biological Safety Officers (BSOs)
Contacts for IBCs

Subject: Participation in National Biosafety Stewardship Month

The National Institutes of Health is pleased to announce October 2015 as National Biosafety Stewardship Month. As a reminder, National Biosafety Stewardship Month is a period during which institutions are encouraged to reinforce their attention to biosafety policies, practices and procedures. Last year, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) launched National Biosafety Stewardship Month to promote institutional awareness of and commitment to biosafety policies, practices, and procedures. NIH leadership was impressed by the multitude of activities institutions engaged in during the month, such as implementing new training materials, hosting town hall meetings focused on biosafety practices, conducting rigorous inventory checks, and developing creative outreach materials to highlight the importance of conducting vital research safely. Given the successes of last year, we are enthusiastic for this year's National Biosafety Stewardship Month, and encourage your institutions to take this opportunity to reinforce your attention to sustaining and enhancing a culture of safety and responsibility in life science research laboratories.

What is my institution's role in National Biosafety Stewardship Month?

In the past year there has continued to be a great deal of public interest in biosafety, and it is of the highest importance that the public feel confident that life sciences research is being conducted responsibly and in accordance with all applicable regulations. Participation in National Biosafety Stewardship Month is just one opportunity to show your institution's commitment to these important endeavors.

As with last year, you will have a critical role in the success of this effort by reinforcing and optimizing activities that are already integral to your biosafety programs. I am also calling on senior Institutional leadership to support your institution's participation in National Biosafety Stewardship Month.

The focus of National Biosafety Stewardship Month in 2015 will be on sustaining and enhancing a culture of safety and responsibility in life science research laboratories. Thematic elements of enhancing a culture of safety and responsibility include:

Training

- Enhancing biosafety training for all staff involved in both the conduct and oversight of life sciences research.
- Promoting the development of comprehensive Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and ensuring all personnel are trained on those SOPs.

Engagement

- Engaging senior institutional research administrators to support and communicate the importance of biosafety,
- Encouraging principal investigators to take an active role with respect to biosafety in their laboratories, and
- Encouraging institutions to foster the development of non-punitive incident reporting systems that provide lessons learned regarding optimal responses to incidents and identification of strategies to minimize risks.

Transparency

- Highlighting successes the institution has had in conducting vital research responsibly through a safe and ethical framework.
- Promoting public transparency regarding institutional oversight of biosafety.

For National Biosafety Stewardship Month in 2015, NIH is encouraging institutions to develop policies, procedures, and programs that further the goals described above.

While NIH has designated October to be National Biosafety Stewardship Month, it does not mean that all of the above mentioned activities need to be conducted only during that month. It is NIH's expectation that institutions are considering these issues though out the year. However, October has been designated as the month in which we request institutions to redouble their efforts with respect to biosafety.

What if I have questions about our efforts to participate in National Biosafety Stewardship Month?

Questions about National Biosafety Stewardship Month can be directed to:

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Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

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