

## Compendium of National Approaches to Biosafety and Biosecurity (August 2008)

### SWITZERLAND

#### A) BIOSAFETY

Switzerland is a confederation, and as such, matters pertaining to biosafety are largely within the remit of the cantonal authorities. The latter can, however, turn to federal agencies for assistance and support.

#### LEGAL BASES:

Based on three laws (on epidemics, on non-human gene technology and on the protection of the environment), activities involving the contained use of genetically modified organisms and pathogenic organisms in laboratories, production facilities, greenhouses and premises housing animals are regulated by four specific ordinances. These are:

- Ordinance on the contained use of organisms of 1999 ('Containment Ordinance')
- Ordinance on the release of organisms of 1999
- Ordinance on occupational safety in biotechnology of 1999
- Ordinance on protection against major accidents of 1991

These ordinances define the various protection objectives for research, diagnosis or production activities. Activities must be notified or licensed according to their potential risks to human health and environment. Some of the ordinances and laws are currently in the process of revision.

#### PRINCIPAL AGENCIES:

On the federal level, the lead agency regarding biosafety is the **Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH)** of the **Federal Department of Home Affairs**. The FOPH is responsible for instance for

- the monitoring/containment of communicable diseases;
- the assignment of reference laboratories
- the protection of public health from the natural, accidental or deliberate release of pathogenic substances

The **Federal Coordination Centre for Biotechnology (FCCB)** is the licensing authority. Anyone who carries out activities with pathogenic or genetically modified organisms has to notify the FCCB (for activities with organisms in risk groups 1 and 2) or obtain a licence (for activities with organisms in risk groups 3 and 4). This can be done electronically by accessing the ECOGEN Internet database.

All activities in a laboratory involving highly contagious **animal diseases** (OIE list A) require authorisation by the **Swiss Federal Veterinary Office**. A permit is only issued if the cantonal veterinary office gives its approval.

The **Swiss Expert Committee for Biosafety (SECB)** is a permanent committee which advises the federal authorities on the drafting of laws, ordinances, guidelines and recommendations, and which reports to the federal and cantonal authorities on the enforcement of these regulations.

The **Spiez Laboratory**, which is attached to the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport, is the Swiss institute for protection against nuclear, biological, and chemical threats and hazards. A Biosafety-Level 4 (BSL-4) laboratory is under construction and should be operational by 2010. Education and training in biosafety will be two important tasks of the new BSL-4 laboratory.

Other agencies which are involved in the processes of monitoring biosafety are:

- **Federal Office for the Environment**
- **Federal Office for Agriculture**
- **Swiss Ethics Committee on Non-human Gene Technology**

#### TRAINING:

The **Biosafety Curriculum for Swiss Biosafety Officers (BSO)** was established by the Federal Office for the Environment the Federal Office of Public Health and the Federal Office for Civil Protection and will be implemented by 2009. According to the curriculum, biosafety officers working in BSL-1, BSL-2 and BSL-3 facilities are trained during three, five and seven days respectively. *For more detailed information see the Swiss Compendium on Approaches to Oversight, Education and Awareness Raising.*

## B) BIOSECURITY

The confederate structure of Switzerland defines the attribution of competencies regarding biosecurity. In a biological incident with criminal intent, the immediately responsible agency is the police of the canton concerned. The federal agencies become involved once a request for assistance from the cantonal agencies has been received.

Nonetheless, broader issues concerning monitoring of possible threats are permanently within the remit of the different branches of the federal police (fedpol).

### LEGAL BASES:

In addition to the laws and ordinances pertaining to biosafety, there are a number of legal provisions particularly relevant to biosecurity. Amongst them are:

- Swiss Penal Code of 1937
- Federal Law on War Material of 1996
- Federal Law on the Control of Goods Suitable for Civilian and Military Purposes and Specific Military Goods of 1996
- Ordinance on War Material of 1998
- Ordinance on the Export, Import, and Transit of Goods Suitable for Civilian and Military Purposes and Specific Military Goods of 1997

### AGENCIES:

The lead agency regarding biosecurity on the federal level is the **Federal Office of Police (fedpol)** of the **Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP)**. Fedpol's **Service for Analysis and Prevention (SAP)** is the Swiss domestic security and counterintelligence agency. It analyses, in collaboration with the **Strategic Intelligence Service (SIS)** the threat posed by biological terrorism.

Amongst a host of other federal agencies that could potentially become involved in the prevention of or response to a bioterrorist incident are the:

- **Federal Office of Civil Protection**
- **Swiss Federal Office of Public Health**
- **State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)**
- **Swiss Armed Forces**

### ACTIVITIES (SELECTION):

#### Prophylax

Due to increasing awareness that Switzerland is an attractive marketplace for procuring technology and equipment from the chemical and bio-technological industry, **fedpol** has started a programme called *Prophylax*. Its objective is to prevent proliferation and industrial espionage. It aims to *systematically improve the control of exports of military and dual-use goods by sensitizing companies that trade in high-risk goods and high-risk countries and raising their awareness*. The program is run by **fedpol** in close collaboration with the **State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)** and the cantonal police corps.

#### Project "National NBC Protection"

In 2004, the Federal Commission for NBC Protection (ComNBC) was given the task to elaborate a comprehensive concept on national NBC protection. The project aimed to improve CBRN protection, preparedness and response capabilities in Switzerland by creating an inventory of relevant organizations as well as their current tasks in order to highlight areas where further action is needed. The project resulted in various recommendations with respect to procedural and organizational issues.

#### Security Steering Group

The Security Steering Group, made up by high-level members of the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Justice and Police and the Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport is charged with, amongst others, the elaboration of a possible response scenario to a bioterrorist incident. The ongoing dialogue and interaction between the different agencies concerned is one important aspect of the discussions of this group.

#### Factsheet 'Biology for peace – preventing the misuse of life sciences'

This year, the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport, the Federal Department of Economic Affairs and the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs produced a **factsheet about the dual-use potential of research in the life-sciences**. The factsheet is to be distributed among the research community (universities, research institutions, relevant professional organisations) later this year.