

Compendium of National Approaches to Oversight of Science, Education and Awareness Raising (August 2008)

SWITZERLAND

BIOSAFETY CURRICULUM

Many countries require a biosafety officer (or biosafety coordinator) for all biorisk facilities. In Switzerland, the **ordinance on the contained use of organisms (CO)** stipulates that every such facility needs to designate a particular person to oversee biological safety. The ordinance further establishes that this person must have a sufficient professional background, as well as a knowledge of safety issues, but no further details are given regarding the required background and training.

To fill this gap, three Federal Offices (Federal Office for the Environment, Federal Office of Public Health, and Federal Office for Civil Protection) initiated and funded a **project to set up a biosafety curriculum for Swiss biosafety officers**. The project was supervised by a steering committee composed of representatives of the three offices, the Swiss Expert Committee for Biosafety, two regulators from the 'canton' level, one expert of the Swiss Accident Insurance Company (Suva), and three biosafety professionals (including the two contractors).

The goal of the project was to develop a curriculum including topics and duration, and present a feasible modular course structure. Furthermore the project was to be positioned within the international biosafety network.

The result is a **curriculum with a duration of three, five and seven days for biosafety officers working in BSL-1, BSL-2, and BSL-3 facilities, respectively**. The prerequisites to become a biosafety officer are a degree in either biology, medicine (MD or VMD), or in certain engineering disciplines (BSc). Required are furthermore two years' working experience in a BSL 1/2/3 facility, the attendance of the course and an exam. For BSL-2 and 3 the participant can, on one of the days, choose from elective topics that meet his or her demands best. All biosafety officers must attend an annual refresher course (1 day for BSL-1 and 2, and 2 days for BSL-3) where they can choose from 22 elective topics.

It is planned to **implement the course by 2009**. The implementation is connected to, and may depend on, the revision of the CO within the next two years. It is foreseen to establish the curriculum as a mandatory requirement for Swiss BSO in the CO.

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.