

BLUE RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE LEAGUE

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WHY NBAF IS A WEAPONS LAB National Bio and Agro-defense Facility

We are convinced that the purpose of the proposed National Bio and Agro-defense Facility would be to create and test biological weapons. The evidence is compelling.

The original list of sites for the National Bio and Agro-defense Facility included the nuclear weapons laboratory at Lawrence Livermore in California. Thousands of local residents organized to stop the lab from expanding its mission.

The US Department of Homeland Security intends the new NBAF to be more than just a replacement facility for Plum Island Animal Disease Center. According to a recent report to Congress, DHS intends it to exceed both the capacity and capabilities of the Plum Island laboratories.^a The new lab would create and test diseases harmful to humans and for which there are no treatments or vaccines.

The US Department of Homeland Security's threat assessment targets Smallpox, Bubonic Plague, Botulism and Ebola. These are pathogens which may be "weaponized."^b They are not agricultural diseases. They are microbes and toxins which cause human illness and death.

Department of Homeland Security labs will engage in acquiring, growing, modifying, storing, stabilizing, packaging and dispersing biological agents.^b These activities are by nature dual use—both defensive and offensive.

The Department of Homeland Security is exempt from the federal Freedom of Information Act. The proposed NBAF disease laboratory would operate in a shroud of secrecy. A true disease research facility requires open scientific debate and peer review, both of which would be denied at the new lab.

The US Department of Agriculture has had and continues to have programs to protect the nation's food supply. The USDA works with the Department of Health and Human Services and other federal agencies to protect the nation's agriculture from terrorist threats. However, the NBAF is a project of the Department of Homeland Security, not the Department of Agriculture. A Google search of the USDA's website for "National Bio and Agro-defense Facility" or "NBAF" results in zero hits.

There are many research labs already protecting North Carolina's cows, pigs and chickens. Presently, two dozen bio-safety level 3 facilities are located in the Triangle at colleges, universities and state and federal government agencies. Among these is the NC Dept of Agriculture Rollins Animal Disease Diagnostic Lab. Also, the State Laboratory of Public Health operates several BSL-3 facilities with bio-terror response capability.

A National Bio and Agro-defense Facility anywhere in the United States could violate the international Biological Weapons Convention which outlaws all such weapons. The proper institutions for protection from biological weapons are international, allowing all nations to benefit from mutual protections.

The United States Congress must hold hearings at which representatives of the Department of Homeland Security would be forced to answer detailed questions about the prospective use of the proposed disease lab to develop biological weapons. We are unaware of any DHS spokesperson affirming in writing that the proposed Granville County facility has no such purpose or potential. The exemptions from FOIA for this facility must be removed and permitting must be open.

January 17, 2008

References

- a. *The National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility: Issues for Congress*, CRS Report for Congress, RL34160, Shea DA et al, updated November 15, 2007, downloaded January 17, 2008 at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/RL34160.pdf>
- b. *Leading Edge of Biodefense*, The National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center-Dept. of Homeland Security, Korch G, 2004, downloaded January 17, 2008 at <http://www.cbwtransparency.org/archive/nbacc.pdf>