

To: Members of the Advisory Committee on the guidelines for recombinant DNA.

Concerning: Those guidelines..

1975

From: Genetics and Society Group; Science for the People.

Dear friend:

We are sending you a copy of our position paper, previously presented at the 1975 meeting of the American Society for Microbiologists. We do this, because we feel that the pack of mailings sent out by the NIH on this matter is incomplete, and many criticisms made by many other concerned individuals have been brushed aside.

Under separate cover you will be receiving a mailing from the "Boston Area Recombinant Group", which raises criticisms and suggestions about (a) quality of containment facilities; (b) the nature of experiments to be prohibited; and (c) the nature of the biological vectors to be used in these experiments. We believe these recommendations are prudent, and worthy of serious consideration.

In addition, we wish to raise the question of establishing mechanisms of responsibility and enforcement. We do not believe these aspects should be left in limbo, since it is well known that not only are there some irresponsible investigators in science but the pressure to publish, encourages a type of speed up in research that ignores safety and social responsibility.

The potential dangers of the new technology are unknown, but all concerned concede that they could be great. Thus, the requirement that investigators file a public biohazard impact statement in order to receive NIH funding is not unreasonable. Such a statement would act as a self-educating device, as well as an alert to the general scientific community. The statement would consider the possible effects on the health of workers in the institution as well as the surrounding environment.

The establishment of local biohazard safety committees is also important. These committees should include not only the principal investigators, but also representatives of technicians and students, laboratory support personnel, clerical workers, and custodians. These committees would be excellent forms for safety education, as well as more objective watchdogs on possible infringement of safety requirements. The authority of these committees to restrict hazardous work should be guaranteed.

We believe that the new recombinant DNA technology has all the promise and perils that atomic energy had in the 1940's (and still has today). Now, by showing the utmost self and social responsibility, the scientific community can ensure that the benefits of this technology accrue to all with the least risk.

Sincerely,

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