

BIENNIAL REPORT OF THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE (OHSC), 2010–2011

1. The Biennial Report of the IARC Occupational Health and Safety Committee (OHSC), 2010–2011 was presented by its Chairman, Dr Robert Baan, to the 48th Session of the Scientific Council in February 2012 (document SC/48/5). The Scientific Council thanked Dr Baan for his presentation and noted the Report.

2. The OHSC is composed of members chosen to represent each laboratory floor, the epidemiology groups, the Biological Resource Centre building (BRC), the Latarjet building, and a representative of the IARC Staff Association. The Administrative Services Officer, the Staff Physician and the Laboratory Safety Officer are *ex officio* members. The Chairperson of the OHSC is nominated by the Director.

3. The Committee met seven times during 2010–2011. The minutes of these meetings are posted on the OHSC web site on the Intranet.

4. The Chairperson, the Staff Physician and the Laboratory Safety Officer convene regularly, to discuss actions to be undertaken and to propose agenda items for the meetings of the full Committee.

A. General well-being

5. Each year, the Agency welcomes about a hundred newcomers (trainees, fellows, visitors, new staff members) who have to follow a general safety introduction on the Intranet, to become aware of the basic IARC safety rules and to know what to do in case of an emergency.

6. A fire-extinguisher briefing is held yearly to remind personnel of the use of fire extinguishers and to refresh the basic instructions to follow in case of an emergency.

7. A course for the emergency first-aid team is conducted every year.

8. The Staff Physician accompanied by the Laboratory Safety Officer is in the process of visiting the floors of all three buildings in order to better assess working conditions and potential health hazards.

9. The OHSC's web site on the intranet has been redesigned to improve visibility and accessibility of the information and to make it more user-friendly. The new site was launched on 5 October 2011.

B. Laboratories

Training courses

10. During the biennium, training programmes for newcomers in the laboratories (21 in 2010 and 30 in 2011) were conducted regularly to promote safe working procedures and good laboratory practices (GLP).
11. Courses were conducted on procedures and GLP applicable to cell-culture work in level-2 (L2) facilities and on safety procedures in dealing with emergencies in level-3 (L3) facilities.
12. A refresher course was given by Air Liquide Santé on the risks associated with handling liquid nitrogen. All personnel working in the cryogenic rooms attended this course.

Radioprotection

13. The number of registered people for handling radioisotopes remains low (10 to 15) and experiments involving radioisotopes are becoming less frequent.
14. Following the detection of low levels of radiation shown by dosimeters placed on the 6th floor, an investigation was conducted by the French IRSN (Institut de Radioprotection et de Sûreté Nucléaire) in February 2010. The results of this radiological control indicated that these levels of exposure, although detectable, remained low and were coming from the plasterboards used for the walls of the 5th and 6th floors in the Tower building. These two floors were fitted out later than the other floors and the building materials contain a small amount of radio-isotopes derived from uranium, which is naturally found in some regions of France. The measured level of gamma-radiation is similar to the background levels found in high granitic regions in France and is not known to pose a health hazard. However, specific precautionary measures have been put in place to protect technical staff involved in working on these walls (drilling, demolition), in order to avoid exposure to dust.
15. Following the purchase of a gas chromatograph (CPG Series 7890A) with a micro-electron capture detector containing a sealed source of radioactive nickel [⁶³Ni], a request to upgrade IARC's status was sent to the French ASN (Autorité de Sûreté Nucléaire) to obtain accreditation.

Actions to improve working conditions and to create a safer occupational environment at IARC

16. Ethidium bromide, the widely used dye to stain DNA was withdrawn from all the molecular biology laboratories and replaced by Gel Red, which has not been shown to be mutagenic.
17. A "dark reader" trans-illuminator (using a blue light instead of UV) has been bought and installed in a laboratory. It avoids UV exposure, especially during the long process of cutting agarose gel bands.
18. In order to improve the ergonomic situation, small liquid-nitrogen tanks containing cell cultures have been transferred from the Tower basement to a cryogenic room in the BRC building, where the filling of the tanks is done using a semi-automated device. This renders the process less physically demanding and more convenient. Safety instructions and procedures have been implemented for access to the cryogenic room for the collection of cells.

19. A survey conducted among laboratory personnel has shown that 34% reported irritation on their hands, which was associated to the hand-soap being used. A new soap, which is gentler on the skin, has been introduced. The survey also showed that 18% of laboratory personnel had some indication of latex allergy, thus nitrile gloves have been introduced in the laboratories to gradually replace the allergenic latex gloves.
20. Since its inception in 2002, the questionnaire focusing on the use of dangerous products continues to be administered to all laboratory personnel twice a year. The data are collated and computerized in an Access file. The information collected during the survey is used to monitor the pattern of exposure and to identify potential exposure hazards. This is a valuable tool used by the Staff Physician. This information is also useful to develop specific training programmes according to the Health and Safety needs of the Agency.
21. Only minor incidents were reported during 2010–2011, which did not cause any serious injury.