



BIENNIAL REPORT OF THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE (OHSC), 2012–2013

1. The IARC Occupational Health and Safety Committee (OHSC) is composed of 16 members chosen to represent each laboratory floor, the epidemiology groups, the Biological Resource Centre building (BRC), the Latarjet building and the Administrative Services Office (ASO). The OHSC also includes the Staff Physician and the Laboratory Safety Officer.
2. The OHSC met nine times during 2012–2013. The minutes of each meeting are posted on the OHSC website on the Intranet.
3. In August 2012 Robert Baan retired as OHSC Chairperson and Florence Le Calvez-Kelm was nominated by the Director to assume this role. At the end of 2012, the Staff Physician Dr Dorothee Cuche left the Agency after four years of service. An interim Staff Physician, Dr Michel Baduraux, was appointed pending the recruitment of a new Staff Physician.

A. General well-being

4. Upon their arrival at IARC, all newcomers (about a hundred every year) receive the IARC Safety Manual and a general safety introduction from the Laboratory Safety Officer; newcomers working in IARC laboratories (around 30 every year) receive an additional briefing specifically dedicated to laboratory safety rules and good practices and must fill in a questionnaire on related issues.
5. During the summer of 2012 work on the air conditioning and ventilation systems was undertaken in the Tower building and, in order to minimize the impact on research projects, temporary laboratories were installed in the BRC building and temporary offices in meeting rooms. The Administration and the OHSC worked together to provide the best alternative working conditions to all personnel.
6. A fire-extinguisher briefing is held annually to remind IARC personnel of the proper use of fire extinguishers and to provide basic instructions to follow in case of emergency. In October 2013, to encourage interactive communication on general health and safety issues at work, the Committee prepared and distributed a quiz to all personnel and presented the results and discussed the answers during the last fire-extinguisher exercise. The questionnaire was well received and the rates of good responses were high. The Committee was pleased to note that its action contributed to increase awareness on specific safety issues.

7. The Committee informed the Administration that the switch from plastic to paper cups in the coffee machine would benefit the environment and most importantly staff health, avoiding exposure to potential unsafe chemicals such as bisphenol A and others. Changes have been made accordingly.

B. Laboratories

Training courses

8. Two refresher courses were held on the risks associated with liquid nitrogen handling, one for the IARC security team, so that its members are well-trained in case of need and the other for the personnel working in the cryogenic rooms.

9. A refresher training course was held for L3 laboratory users in order to provide safety guidelines adapted to the required security level.

Radioprotection

10. In June 2012, the ASN (Autorité de Sûreté Nucléaire) inspected the management of radioactive compounds (sources and wastes) as well as radioprotection at IARC. Following this inspection, improvements were made to facilitate the identification of radioactive zones and, as the use of radioisotopes is now infrequent, adjustments were made to personnel surveillance measures. Wrist dosimeters have been replaced by finger dosimeters to improve monitoring of hand exposure. Both chest and finger dosimeters are given on request, depending on the users' needs. This visit emphasized the fact that traceability is very important.

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) authorization

11. A request for the renewal of IARC Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) authorization was submitted to the "Commission de Génie Génétique" of the "Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche" in August 2013. Notably, it includes a description of (i) the projects using GMOs, including class 3, (ii) the security of the installations, (iii) the procedures established to ensure security of the personnel, the population and the environment, and finally (iv) an emergency plan specific to class 3 confinements.

Biobank

12. The oxygen level detection system was changed at the end of 2012 as the old one had become obsolete and was no longer reliable.

13. The Staff Physician raised concerns on potentially dangerous working conditions in the cryogenic rooms, especially during the automatic filling of the tanks, as several were showing some deficiencies. Repairs have been undertaken and, after discussion with the Administration, funds have been released to purchase two new tanks, one for backup and one as a replacement for the cell lines storage liquid nitrogen tanks which require manual refilling. These funds will

also cover the installation of two surveillance cameras in each of the three cryogenic rooms, permanently connected to the reception desk to monitor staff using the rooms.

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

14. Investigations were conducted on potential gel dye contamination (Gel Red and remaining traces of Ethidium bromide) in laboratories. Contamination was found in the gel visualisation laboratory spaces. Reminders of good laboratory practices have been provided to all laboratory groups especially on simple handling procedures to prevent the spread of gel dye contamination across different laboratories and floors.

15. A control of all exhaust hoods, biosafety cabinets and centrifuges was carried out in 2013, and the consequent repairs undertaken.

16. During the biennium, two widely used cell culture rooms were totally renovated to provide proper L2 confinement and better and safer working conditions for personnel.

Incidents and accidents

17. Following an incident when a staff member suffered a small cut while handling biological samples, a new protocol was put in place so that a blood test can be done easily and rapidly.

18. An incident was reported in a laboratory, when an inappropriate mix of organic solvents and acids led to the emission of toxic vapours. Fortunately the incident occurred under a fume hood, thus limiting the exposure. The Committee discussed several issues raised by this incident, including working late while alone, or going to the hospital unaccompanied after an incident. The question of what actions should immediately follow an accident at work was addressed through a question in the quiz and discussed at the fire exercise.

19. The Staff Physician adapted the medical surveillance procedure for laboratory personnel: blood tests are now done before each staff member's yearly medical check-up, instead of annually at a fixed date. This change better fits individual needs and blood tests will be adapted to specific potential chemical exposures mentioned in the questionnaire that all laboratory personnel must complete every six months.