

Bio Terror Bible

EXPOSING THE COMING BIO-TERROR PANDEMIC

BIOTERRORBIBLE.COM: The following propaganda was published within the calendar year of 2006. While some of the following reports may have been legitimate news stories, most if not all of them appear to be blatant propaganda with the overall goal of convincing American and the World that it is on the precipice of a bio-terror induced pandemic. The fact that this propaganda exists in mass confirms that an upcoming bio-terror attack is in the cards and may be played in a last ditch effort to regain political, economic and military control of society.

Title: Responding to Biological Attacks

Date: January 2006

Source: [CFR](#) (Council on Foreign Relations)

Abstract:

How dangerous could biological terrorism be?

The anthrax-laced letters mailed in the fall of 2001 infected twenty-three people and killed five—a toll that only hinted at the damage bioterrorism could cause. In a 2001 government exercise called Dark Winter, a simulated “worst-case” terrorist attack with smallpox virus—a germ more worrisome than the anthrax bacterium because it’s contagious—was projected to cause some 300,000 smallpox cases within three weeks, about one in three of which would be fatal. Plague, anthrax, and other diseases could also be major killers.

Have terrorists experimented with biological weapons before?

Yes. CIA Director George Tenet has testified that documents found in Afghanistan showed that the [al-Qaeda](#) terrorist network was pursuing sophisticated biological weapons research in Afghanistan. [Aum Shinrikyo](#), a doomsday cult in Japan, had an ambitious biological weapons program and released anthrax spores and botulinum toxin in Tokyo on several occasions, but none of the attacks inflicted any known casualties. Iraq, the Soviet Union, and other countries experimented extensively with anthrax bacteria and other germs as recently as the 1990s. (The United States abandoned its offensive biowarfare program in 1969 and destroyed its biological arsenal in the early 1970s.)

How is the U.S. government responding to the threat of bioterrorism?

Through a wide variety of measures including:

1. The Department of Health and Human Services has established a new Office of Public Health Preparedness to address bioterrorist threats.
2. In July 2002, Dr. Julie Gerberding, an infectious diseases expert noted for her work combating anthrax and bioterrorism, was named director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
3. In December 2002, the Bush administration announced plans to start inoculating some ten million health-care, emergency, law-enforcement, and military personnel against smallpox before making the vaccine available to the general public on a voluntary basis in 2004.

4. In January 2003, the Bush administration created a system designed to detect the release of deadly germs like anthrax and smallpox within twenty-four hours by adapting many of the Environmental Protection Agency's 3,000 air-quality monitoring stations nationwide.

Funding to combat bioterrorism, which was increasing even before September 11 and the 2001 anthrax letters, has shot up in their wake. A June 2002 bioterrorism law provided \$4.6 billion for stockpiling medicines and vaccines, enhancing inspections of the nation's food supply, increasing water-system security, and improving hospital preparedness. In President Bush's January 2003 State of the Union address, he proposed spending \$6 billion more for research and production of vaccines and other treatments against agents like anthrax, botulinum toxin, Ebola, and plague.

Will the increased spending help?

It should, experts say. The threat from bioterrorism is serious, but quick and effective public health and medical responses could save many lives. Preparedness has improved significantly in recent months, and public health authorities are on alert. Nevertheless, state and local governments are inadequately prepared to cope with a major bioterrorist attack. The new spending is earmarked for scientific research, public health initiatives, vaccine and drug stockpiles, hospital preparedness, and disease surveillance and response systems at the federal, state, and local levels. Down the road, the planned expenditures should also produce indirect benefits for public health in general, experts say. **What diseases are authorities most worried about?**

The "Category A" list of biological threat agents—as classified by the CDC—includes the germs that cause anthrax, botulism, plague, smallpox, tularemia, and hemorrhagic fever viruses such as Ebola. These infectious diseases cause potentially high death rates, could trigger public panic, and require special action to cure and contain. A few are contagious (smallpox, plague, and Ebola). More than a dozen other types of biological disease threats are classified by the CDC as generally less dangerous but still capable of killing many victims.

How would health authorities discover that a biological attack was underway?

Bioterrorism can be hard to detect, experts say. Environmental monitoring might be able to pick up signs of an airborne release of germs, assuming authorities knew where to look. But an attack could go unnoticed until victims feel sick and visit hospitals. A 1984 outbreak of food poisoning in a small Oregon town that sickened 751 people was initially believed to be a natural outbreak; only a year later did authorities realize that a religious cult called the Rajneeshees had deliberately contaminated salad bars with salmonella bacteria ([CFR, 2006](#)).

Title: New York State Ill-Prepared For Major Pandemic Breakout

Date: January 11, 2006

Source: [Homeland Security News Wire](#)

Abstract: New York state had better hope that no avian flu pandemic break, because the state is just not ready

If the bird flu epidemic or another major outbreak were to strike New York state, the state emergency health care system would be poorly prepared to handle a surge of patients, according to a report released yesterday. The national report card by the American College of Emergency Physicians does gave the state high marks in areas of public health and injury prevention, ranking New York first in the nation for its low incidence of fatal job-related injuries, second for its low incidence of fatalities in alcohol-related crashes and third for annual per capita expenditure on hospital care.

"But that says nothing about the state's ability to react to the bird flu," said Sandra Schneider, ACEP board member and chair of the Department of Emergency Care at the University of Rochester. New York state received an overall C+ grade for its emergency care system, slightly higher than the C- rating given

to the nation as a whole. The state was ranked 30th in its ratio of board-certified emergency room doctors to 100,000 people and ranked 49th with only 7.7 emergency departments for every 1 million people.

Very upsetting:

The U.S. overall grade on health emergency preparedness: C-

We would probably be upset if one of our children came home with a grade of C- in basket weaving or ballroom dancing. How upset should we be when the governments of the fifty states receive a C- on the ability of the United States to cope effectively with emergency health crises such as pandemic or bioterror attacks? If you say we should be very upset, we would respond with that line from Tom Cruise in "Mission Impossible": "You've never seen me very upset."

The National Report Card on the State of Emergency Medicine in the United States says in its report that the emergency medicine system of the United States as a whole has earned a grade of C- — barely above a D. This represents an average of the overall grades for all states and the District of Columbia, as well as data received from ACEP's Government Services and Puerto Rico chapters. No state scored either an A or F for its overall grade. California, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and the District of Columbia led the nation with overall grades of B. Rating worst in the nation with overall grades of D+ or D were Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming. More than 80 percent of states earned poor or near-failing overall grades (C+ to D) ([Homeland Security News Wire, 2006](#)).

Title: Advances In Life Sciences May Offer Terrorists Novel Bioterror Weapons

Date: February 3, 2006

Source: [Homeland Security News Wire](#)

Abstract: As is the case with other aspects of technology, the onward march of biotechnology holds both promise and peril

A committee of the U.S. National Academy of Science says advances in the life sciences have made it possible to manipulate living organisms in useful ways, leading to improvements in public health, agriculture, and other areas. There is a dark side, too, however. The panel points out the growing risk that biomedical advances will be used to make novel biological weapons or misused by careless groups and individuals. The panel has issued a new report outlining the risks and recommending ways of identifying and avoiding them.

As a start, the panel says the global scientific community should broaden its awareness of what bioterrorism can do. Panelist Joshua Epstein, an economist with the Brookings Institution in Washington, emphasizes the importance of looking ahead and considering not merely current biomedical threats.

"We are acutely aware that these technologies are developing at an unprecedented pace, that they are distributed globally, and that these trends — we only expect them to gain momentum," he noted.

The group recommends creation of an independent advisory board to analyze and forecast these fast changing scientific and technological trends to keep U.S. intelligence and national security officials informed of potential life science threats ([Homeland Security News Wire, 2006](#)).

Title: Invest In Biotech To Fight Bioterror, Say Researchers

Date: February 27, 2006

Source: [Science Daily](#)

Abstract: Wealthy nations should promote the use of biotechnology in developing countries as this would combat the risk of 'bioterrorism' — the use of living agents such as bacteria to attack people or plants — says a report released today.

It urges the G8 group of most industrialised nations to create a global network of experts, leaders and citizens to help poorer nations develop and regulate biotechnology by providing training and policy advice.

The report says that boosting developing countries' capacity to use biotechnology as a tool for development would increase vigilance against the science being misused.

It highlights the ways biotechnology can assist developing countries, ranging from producing vaccines to breeding improved crop varieties.

But fears are growing that, with so much scientific information in the public domain, individuals, groups or even states could use biotechnology to develop chemical weapons fairly easily.

Co-author Abdallah Daar of the University of Toronto's Joint Center for Bioethics, Canada says the network would be particularly useful in Africa, as many nations there lack policies regulating biotechnology research.

Last year, delegates at a meeting in Uganda warned that a failure to address concerns over biological weapons could undermine efforts to develop and instill confidence in science ([Science Daily, 2006](#)).

Title: Infectious Defense

Date: June 14, 2006

Source: [Discovery](#)

Abstract: In the fall of 2001, five people died after exposure to weapons-grade spores of the *Bacillus anthracis* bacterium—anthrax—delivered in postal letters. The crime, which remains unsolved, brought national and international attention to the looming danger of bioterrorism and biological warfare. Future bioterror attacks may be unavoidable, says retired United States Army Colonel David R. Franz, who has spent more than 25 years studying—and preparing medical countermeasures against—biological warfare and bioterrorism. Franz, who worked as a veterinarian before earning a doctorate in physiology, is currently the vice president and chief biological scientist at the Midwest Research Institute. He is also the first director of the National Agricultural Biosecurity Center. In the late 1990s, Franz served as the chief inspector on three biological warfare inspections to Iraq for the United Nations Special Commission. During your inspections of Iraq, you found bioweapons.

DF: We did. In that era, 1998, we found them. I don't think it was a high-quality program.

Were you surprised bioweapons weren't found in the recent inspections?

DF: No. Right before we went in the second time, I was on record for both MSNBC and CNN saying that I won't be at all shocked if we don't find biological weapons this time.

It sounds like I had a lot of wisdom, but in my next breath, on MSNBC and CNN, I said that we will absolutely find chemical weapons.

Why hasn't a biological terrorism attack happened?

DF: The hardest question I am asked is why it hasn't happened. It is not necessarily as easy as everyone says. When you work through all the possible scenarios, you find technical difficulties for the bad guys,

fortunately. That is why, I think, I'm less concerned about it than [the average person] who just knows that bad things can happen with biology.

I think of a spectrum of technical barriers. On the very low end, something like foot-and-mouth disease in cattle... On the far end of the spectrum there are the classical agents—anthrax, plague, tularemia. There are significant technical issues there.

Why hasn't an attack at the lowest level occurred? That's a behavioral issue, not a technical issue. It is one of intent, it seems to me. And, for some reason it hasn't been done.

Can't we just develop sensors that will detect an attack—anthrax in the air?

DF: If we had that, we might not need to think about vaccines. We would all have a little thing in our pocket or our purse that we could put on to protect our airways. But, I don't think we are going to get there. Biological detectors are complicated. You need antibodies to the bugs, or PCR primers, and the detectors take a lot of care and feeding.

Is there a relationship between emerging disease and bioterror?

DF: Not everyone agrees with me, but I use a very simple equation to think about it: bioterrorism equals emerging infectious disease plus intent.

Could we stop a would-be terrorist if they were intent on causing harm?

DF: I think it would be really tough. If we do, it would likely be through something we pick up in intelligence. We hear something is planned, or someone has this little laboratory in their basement or in a cave somewhere, or we have a scientific colleague, somewhere in the world, working with someone who hears something.

Assuming you can't stop it, then what?

DF: I looked at the bugs and said that for medical countermeasures we can't make a "1-to-N" list and say we are going to go down the list and make a vaccine for each one—there are just too many. So I looked at the [dangerous] outliers.

We now have enough vaccine for smallpox to immunize the population. We have vaccines now for anthrax and antibiotics for anthrax, and we have some stockpiles and a lot of other preparations for foot-and-mouth disease.

Then under that, where we can't afford to do specific countermeasures, I like surveillance, general diagnostics. It is a lot easier to get diagnostics through the FDA. Anything you have to stick into people or that people take orally, there are a lot more hoops to jump through.

And then under that a strong biotechnology and basic bioresearch infrastructure. In the future, I think we'll come up with more generic countermeasures that may boost our immune system a little bit.

How far in the future?

I always say 30 years.

Over the long haul, aren't you going to drive the evolution of the bugs toward being craftier, more resistant?

DF: Probably, to some degree. It depends on the bug.

Is there anything else we can do?

DF: There is no perfect solution. We can't stop a bioterrorist. We might stop some with deterrence, and if it occurs we have these generic countermeasures and a good public-health system, and then for what that can't deal with we need to have our people resilient.

What do you mean by that? Accept that it's going to happen, and just deal with it?

DF: Sort of. Not ever accept terrorism—we're going to do everything we can do to fight this—but be able to deal with it, more mentally than any other way.

I don't think the public would be ready to hear that message. They want to hear that it is not going to happen, and that they're protected if it does.

DF: I think of two examples. One is Israel. They've become a more resilient society. But it isn't by chance. They've focused on education, on understanding terrorism.

And then I remember a snippet of the news I saw after Katrina on the Cajun families out in the rural areas. They just got their boats, their shotguns, checked on their neighbors. They are used to living off the land, and have a close-knit social structure. Those kinds of things can make a great difference. I consider that resilience as well.

Has anyone calculated the odds that an individual person will ever be attacked by a bioterrorist?

DF: You're more likely to be hit by a truck. We lose 440,000 people to smoking related illnesses every year... We lose 20-80,000 people to influenza every year, 120,000 people to automobile accidents. We lose five people to bioterrorism.

I'm sure you know where I'm going: Why spend money on this, which might not ever happen, instead of on these known things?

DF: One reason is that we're willing to let our fellow citizens die if they know it is going to take a long time and they kind of enjoy what leads up to it. Like smoking. We are willing to let people die of influenza if they are old and their immune systems aren't very good and they are probably going to die soon anyway. We are not willing to have even a very low risk of dying if someone intentionally does it. We can do it to ourselves, but nobody can do it to us.

If you were an ingenious bioterrorist, wouldn't you work on some unexpected, not-so dangerous organism, and make it worse?

DF: The bad news is biology is very squishy; the good news is biology is very squishy. For those of us interested in countermeasures, you think you've got a vaccine nailed, or you think you have the perfect antiviral drug – then you find out it is toxic, or the vaccine protects mice but not primates. Fortunately the same holds true for the person who would use biology against us. You can get a group of experts, molecular biologists, virologists, together in a room and they say "I can do this" but you get in a lab and it is not as easy as in the conference room.

What are you most worried about?

DF: I am probably most concerned about the highly contagious human agents—influenza, smallpox—which could have a huge impact on this world, because the world is smaller and we have HIV/AIDS today.

Why does that matter?

DF: I don't think we would ever eradicate smallpox again, because you couldn't immunize AIDS patients or maybe even HIV patients [because they would be vulnerable to the virus in the vaccine].

The other thing that I worry about a concept called "reload." Say you have two kilos of high-quality, powdered anthrax in ten American cities. It might not be totally efficient but can infect a lot of people. Then you say 'in two weeks, I'm going to do the next city and I won't tell you what it is,' then you do the next city. That is feasible, and would be very hard to deal with.

Because of the injuries or the psychological damage?

DF: If they said 'it's going to be Detroit next,' you could deal with it. If they didn't say [where], it would have a real psychological impact. Would you want to go downtown or anywhere if you knew that there were 10,000 people suffering from inhalational anthrax and a lot of them would die?

If anything is scary to me, it is the contagious agents, because an outbreak can start with such a small group of people and just... go.

DF: I think we would change our lifestyles very quickly. We would probably travel a lot less, we would probably wear masks when we go to the grocery store, we would probably wash our hands a lot more.

How much should we worry about agricultural bioterrorism?

DF: The ag threats fall below the threshold that we might compare to large natural disaster. But foot-and-mouth disease is one I worry about because it could devastate our economy. Foot-and-mouth could take us into tens of billions of dollars of economic damage.

If you rewrite history and the 9-11 attacks never happened, would anyone have thought it likely that planes would be hijacked and crashed into targets? So isn't it possible that future attacks will be things you're not looking for?

DF: Go back to my equation that bioterrorism is emerging infectious disease plus intent. We have a good medical infrastructure and public health infrastructure looking for emerging infectious disease. So I think we're in better shape with regard to biology than we are to the next terror event—someone flying airplanes into bridges, those off-the-wall kinds of things ([Discovery, 2006](#)).

Title: The Secretive Fight Against Bioterror

Date: September 15, 2006

Source: [Security Info Watch](#)

Abstract: On the grounds of a military base an hour's drive from the capital, the Bush administration is building a massive biodefense laboratory unlike any seen since biological weapons were banned 34 years ago.

The heart of the lab is a cluster of sealed chambers built to contain the world's deadliest bacteria and viruses. There, scientists will spend their days simulating the unthinkable: bioterrorism attacks in the form of lethal anthrax spores rendered as wispy powders that can drift for miles on a summer breeze, or common viruses turned into deadly superbugs that ordinary drugs and vaccines cannot stop.

The work at this new lab, at Fort Detrick, Md., could someday save thousands of lives -- or, some fear, create new risks and place the United States in violation of international treaties. In either case, much of what transpires at the National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center (NBACC) may never be publicly known, because the Bush administration intends to operate the facility largely in secret.

In an unusual arrangement, the building itself will be classified as highly restricted space, from the reception desk to the lab benches to the cages where animals are kept. Few federal facilities, including nuclear labs, operate with such stealth. It is this opacity that some arms-control experts say has become a defining characteristic of U.S. biodefense policy as carried out by the Department of Homeland Security, NBACC's creator.

Since the department's founding in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks, its officials have dramatically expanded the government's ability to conduct realistic tests of the pathogens and tactics that might be used in a bioterrorism attack. Some of the research falls within what many arms-control experts say is a legal gray zone, skirting the edges of an international treaty outlawing the production of even small amounts of biological weapons.

The administration dismisses these concerns, however, insisting that the work of NBACC is purely defensive and thus fully legal. It has rejected calls for oversight by independent observers outside the department's network of government scientists and contractors. And it defends the secrecy as necessary to protect Americans.

"Where the research exposes vulnerability, I've got to protect that, for the public's interest," said Bernard Courtney, NBACC's scientific director. "We don't need to be showing perpetrators the holes in our defense."

Tara O'Toole, founder of the Center for Biosecurity at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and an adviser to the Defense Department on bioterrorism, said the secrecy fits a larger pattern and could have consequences. "The philosophy and practice behind NBACC looks like much of the rest of the administration's philosophy and practice: 'Our intent is good, so we can do whatever we want,'" O'Toole said. "This approach will only lead to trouble." Although they acknowledge the need to shield the results of some sensitive projects from public view, critics of NBACC fear that excessive secrecy could actually increase the risk of bioterrorism. That would happen, they say, if the lab fosters ill-designed experiments conducted without proper scrutiny or if its work fuels suspicions that could lead other countries to pursue secret biological research.

The few public documents that describe NBACC's research mission have done little to quiet those fears. A computer slide show prepared by the center's directors in 2004 offers a to-do list that suggests the lab will be making and testing small amounts of weaponized microbes and, perhaps, genetically engineered viruses and bacteria. It also calls for "red team" exercises that simulate attacks by hostile groups.

NBACC's close ties to the U.S. intelligence community have also caused concern among the agency's critics. The CIA has assigned advisers to the lab, including at least one member of the "Z-Division," an elite group jointly operated with Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory that specializes in analyzing and duplicating weapons systems of potential adversaries, officials familiar with the program confirm.

Bioweapons experts say the nature of the research envisioned for NBACC demands an unusually high degree of transparency to reassure Americans and the rest of the world of the U.S. government's intentions.

"If we saw others doing this kind of research, we would view it as an infringement of the bioweapons treaty," said Milton Leitenberg, a senior research scholar and weapons expert at the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy. "You can't go around the world yelling about Iranian and North Korean programs -- about which we know very little -- when we've got all this going on."

Created without public fanfare a few months after the 2001 anthrax attacks, NBACC is intended to be the chief U.S. biological research institution engaged in something called "science-based threat assessment." It seeks to quantitatively answer one of the most difficult questions in biodefense: What's the worst that can happen?

To truly answer that question, there is little choice, current and former NBACC officials say: Researchers have to make real biological weapons.

"De facto, we are going to make biowarfare pathogens at NBACC in order to study them," said Penrose "Parney" Albright, former Homeland Security assistant secretary for science and technology.

Other government agencies, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, study disease threats such as smallpox to discover cures. By contrast, NBACC (pronounced EN-back) attempts to get inside the head of a bioterrorist. It considers the wide array of potential weapons available. It looks for the holes in society's defenses where an attacker might achieve the maximum harm. It explores the risks posed by emerging technologies, such as new DNA synthesizing techniques that allow the creation of genetically altered or man-made viruses. And it tries in some cases to test the weapon or delivery device that terrorists might use.

Research at NBACC is already underway, in lab space that has been outsourced or borrowed from the Army's sprawling biodefense campus at Fort Detrick in Frederick. It was at this compound that the U.S. government researched and produced offensive biological weapons from the 1940s until President Richard M. Nixon halted research in 1969. The Army continues to conduct research on pathogens there.

In June, construction began on a \$128 million, 160,000-square-foot facility inside the same heavily guarded compound. Space inside the eight-story, glass-and-brick structure will be divided between NBACC's two major divisions: a forensic testing center tasked with using modern sleuthing techniques to identify the possible culprits in future biological attacks; and the Biothreat Characterization Center, or BTCC, which seeks to predict what such attacks will look like.

It is the BTCC's wing that will host the airtight, ultra-secure containment labs where the most controversial research will be done. Homeland Security officials won't talk about specific projects planned or underway. But the 2004 computer slide show -- posted briefly on a Homeland Security Web site before its discovery by agency critics prompted an abrupt removal -- offers insight into NBACC's priorities.

The presentation by NBACC's then-deputy director, Lt. Col. George Korch, listed 16 research priorities for the new lab. Among them:

"Characterize classical, emerging and genetically engineered pathogens for their BTA [biological threat agent] potential.

"Assess the nature of nontraditional, novel and nonendemic induction of disease from potential BTA.

"Expand aerosol-challenge testing capacity for non-human primates.

"Apply Red Team operational scenarios and capabilities."

Courtney, the NBACC science director, acknowledged that his work would include simulating real biological threats -- but not just any threats.

"If I hear a noise on the back porch, will I turn on the light to decide whether there's something there, or go on my merry way?" Courtney asked. "But I'm only going to do [research] if I have credible information that shows it truly is a threat. It's not going to be dreamed up out of the mind of a novelist."

Administration officials note that there is a tradition for this kind of biological risk assessment, one that extends at least to the Clinton administration. In the late 1990s, for example, a clandestine project run by the Defense Department re-created a genetically modified, drug-resistant strain of the anthrax bacteria believed to have been made by Soviet bioweaponers. Such research helped the government anticipate and prepare for emerging threats, according to officials familiar with the anthrax study.

Some arms-control experts see the comparison as troubling. They argued, then and now, that the work was a possible breach of a U.S.-negotiated international law.

The Bush administration argues that its biodefense research complies with the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, the 1972 treaty outlawing the manufacture of biological weapons, because U.S. motives are pure.

"All the programs we do are defensive in nature," said Maureen McCarthy, Homeland Security's director of research and development, who oversees NBACC. "Our job is to ensure that the civilian population of the country is protected, and that we know what the threats are."

Current and former administration officials say that compliance with the treaty hinges on intent, and that making small amounts of biowarfare pathogens for study is permitted under a broad interpretation of the treaty. Some also argue that the need for a strong biodefense in an age of genetic engineering trumps concerns over what they see as legal hair-splitting.

"How can I go to the people of this country and say, 'I can't do this important research because some arms-control advocate told me I can't'?" asked Albright, the former Homeland Security assistant secretary.

But some experts in international law believe that certain experiments envisioned for the lab could violate the treaty's ban on developing, stockpiling, acquiring or retaining microbes "of types and in quantities that have no justification" for peaceful purposes.

"The main problem with the 'defensive intent' test is that it does not reflect what the treaty actually says," said David Fidler, an Indiana University School of Law professor and expert on the bioweapons convention. The treaty, largely a U.S. creation, does not make a distinction between defensive and offensive activities, Fidler said.

More practically, arms experts say, future U.S. governments may find it harder to object if other countries test genetically engineered pathogens and novel delivery systems, invoking the same need for biodefense.

Already, they say, there is evidence abroad of what some are calling a "global biodefense boom." In the past five years, numerous governments, including some in the developing world -- India, China and Cuba among them -- have begun building high-security labs for studying the most lethal bacteria and viruses.

"These labs have become a status symbol, a prestige item," said Alan Pearson, a biologist at the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation. "A big question is: Will these labs have transparency?"

When it opens in two years, the NBACC lab will house an impressive collection of deadly germs and teams of scientists in full-body "spacesuits" to work with them. It will also have large aerosol-test chambers where animals will be exposed to deadly microbes. But the lab's most controversial feature may be its secrecy.

Homeland Security officials disclosed plans to contractors and other government agencies to classify the entire lab as a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility, or SCIF.

In common practice, a SCIF (pronounced "skiff") is a secure room where highly sensitive information is stored and discussed. Access to SCIFs is severely limited, and all of the activity and conversation inside is presumed to be restricted from public disclosure. There are SCIFs in the U.S. Capitol, where members of Congress are briefed on military secrets. In U.S. nuclear labs, computers that store weapons data are housed inside SCIFs.

Homeland Security officials plan to operate all 160,000 square feet of NBACC as a SCIF. Because of the building's physical security features -- intended to prevent the accidental release of dangerous pathogens -- it was logical to operate it as a SCIF, McCarthy said.

"We need to protect information at a level that is appropriate," McCarthy added, saying she expects much of the lab's less-sensitive work to be made public eventually.

But some biodefense experts, including some from past administrations, viewed the decision as a mistake.

"To overlay NBACC with a default level of high secrecy seems like overkill," said Gerald L. Epstein, a former science adviser to the White House's National Security Council and now a senior fellow with the Center for Strategic and International Studies. While accepting that some secrecy is needed, he said the NBACC plan "sends a message that is not at all helpful."

NBACC officials also have resisted calls for the kind of broad, independent oversight that many experts say is necessary to assure other countries and the American public about their research.

Homeland Security spokesmen insist that NBACC's work will be carefully monitored, but on the department's terms.

"We have our own processes to scrutinize our research, and it includes compliance to the bioweapons convention guidelines as well as scientific oversight," said Courtney, the NBACC scientific director.

In addition to the department's internal review boards, the agency will bring in small groups of "three or four scientists" on an ad-hoc basis to review certain kinds of potentially controversial experiments, Courtney said. The review panels will be "independent," Courtney said, but he noted that only scientists with government security clearances will be allowed to participate ([Security Info Watch, 2006](#)).