

STOP the NBAF

The National Bio- and Agro- Defense Facility

Granville Nonviolent Action Team (GNAT)

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What is the Proposed “NBAF?”

The Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”) plans to build a new facility to research animal and animal-to-human (or “zoonotic”) diseases, for some of which there are no treatments or vaccines. The mission of the “National Bio- and Agro-Defense Research Facility,” or NBAF, is vague and changing, even based on DHS’s own website. The current facility, Plum Island, is on an island off the coast of mainland New York. Congress enacted a law decades ago banning study of diseases such as foot and mouth disease on the mainland U.S. However, some U. S. legislators are now trying to reverse this long-standing law.

Now the DHS—the understaffed agency whose FEMA division so disastrously bungled the response to Katrina—is proposing to build a lab the size of 5 Wal-Marts, just down the road from significant animal and human populations, including long-term hospital patients. The Umstead Research Farm, at the border of Granville and Durham Counties, is one of five locations on the final national list for the facility. Many of the diseases to be studied can be transmitted by mosquitoes and ticks, and by lab workers who may not know they have carried a disease home with them. As the former research director of Plum Island said, any state with a sizable livestock industry would be the worst place to site the lab due to the risks to animals there.

How Secure Would the Facility Really Be?

The proposed facility is intended to have the highest level bio-containment (“BSL-3 and BSL-4”) to handle diseases including foot and mouth disease, Nipah and Hendra viruses, and Rift Valley Fever. All systems, however, are vulnerable to human error and unforeseen events; all buildings have sewer lines and window caulk that can crack, and filters that must be changed. At the Plum Island facility, according to a 2003 report by the U.S. Government Accounting Office:

- In 2003, striking maintenance workers employed by private outside contractors sabotaged the water system on the first day of the strike. They could have easily sabotaged the steam pipes, a key part of the decontamination process. No security system can prevent a strike, or sabotage.
- The GAO investigation – performed two years after the attacks on 9/11 -- revealed that Plum Island did not have adequate controls over access to dangerous disease materials, or even over access to keys.
- Outside maintenance workers were allowed into the bio-containment area without the escorts which were required by the facility’s rules.
- Plum Island could not predict which local law enforcement officials would be able to provide backup in the event of an emergency, and whether they would have enough officers to respond. This situation is possible here, particularly since the proposed facility would be at the border between Granville and Durham counties.
- During Hurricane Bob, a cut in Plum Island’s primary underground power line had been left unrepaired for three months, and the backup overhead power lines blew down.



Accidents Happen at Other Bio-Hazard Labs, Too.

In August 2007, in Surrey England, Foot and Mouth disease was released from a local lab and was discovered only after cattle in the area were found to be infected. The SARS outbreak in Asia was caused by research staff who fell ill after working on the virus. At the Centers for Disease Control labs in Atlanta, lightning blew out the power this

over

summer, and the backup generators didn't come on. At UNC-Chapel Hill, tuberculosis escaped a safety cabinet after a blower fan failed to shut off, and pushed the disease-laden air into the lab room; the alarm had been turned off. In the past year, there was a release of the "zoonotic" disease, Q fever, at Texas A&M University, which was ordered to stop research into potential bioweapons during the investigation. At the Medical University of Ohio, workers were infected with Rift Valley Fever, an airborne disease potentially fatal to humans.

What If a Bio-Hazard is Released from the Lab?

How quickly would the public or even emergency management learn about a release of a hazardous disease from the proposed lab? Time and again, the public has not been notified until weeks or months after an accidental release like those listed above.

Such releases would be more difficult to detect than chemical emissions like those from the Apex EQ hazardous waste fire. A release can be invisible. The NBAF proposal contains no commitment to "real time" monitoring for releases to air and water, so the public and emergency responders may not even know of spreading contamination.

Once a release occurs, diseases may be unknowingly passed by even indirect contact between animals and people, and/or by mosquitoes, ticks and deer. Given that there are no treatments for these diseases, the CDC prescribes quarantine for animals and humans, which may be imposed in an unspecified radius around the facility.

What About Infected Wastes From the Lab?

The hazardous bio-wastes from the proposed facility are a major issue, too. The facility would include an incinerator. As at the Plum Island facility, some waste would be burned, and other waste would be buried. The ongoing laboratory waste stream would include animal remains, laboratory equipment, paints, disinfectants, chemicals, biological waste, and radiation. The burial of contaminated waste would almost certainly contaminate groundwater. The EPA has found that even state of the art, dry-tomb landfills fail, leaching their contaminated contents into the environment as gases are released and as rainwater and groundwater enter and exit the landfill, carrying contaminants with them. The facility would be very close upstream to Raleigh's water supply, Falls Lake. Some wastes could be released to the sewer system with no pre-treatment at all.

Raleigh officials are asking tough questions about aerosol emissions and wastewater from the site. Why aren't our local officials asking tough questions, too? Are they blinded by promises of economic opportunities and an increased tax base?

Who Wants the NBAF in North Carolina?

The Consortium proposing to bring the NBAF here is made up of the bio-tech industry, livestock industry interests, government agencies and academic institutions, including the NC State Veterinary School and university research programs that could get major government grants. Certainly, the pharmaceutical companies and research universities in the area would benefit from the proposed facility - but would area residents?

Who Will Pay the Costs for this Facility, and Who Will Benefit Financially?

The Department of Homeland Security specifically sought proposals from groups that could provide donated land and subsidized infrastructure for the facility. The Umstead Farm site is already state owned, and thus not on the tax rolls. Local taxpayers would bear the burden of added roads, public safety, emergency services, water and sewer.

The facility's proponents project that there will be over 250 jobs with an average yearly salary over \$51,000. The Consortium's proposal includes a diagram of demographics and high educational levels in Durham, Raleigh and Chapel Hill, but doesn't mention the proposed host community, Granville County. While the research jobs will have high salaries, Granville and northern Durham would be expected to supply janitors, lab techs and other low-paid workers. Who will profit from patents from research at the facility? Consortium members - not local residents.

Officials Must Listen to YOUR Concerns!

Our elected representatives need to consider the true risks to their constituents. Many local, state and federal politicians came out in support of the proposed NBAF, even before most area residents had learned about it, and even though at this stage they have only very limited information, as impact studies are just starting. Contact YOUR elected officials. Demand that they stop it.

Find out more at www.nobio.org. Call your local, state and federal elected officials today. Donations may be sent to Granville Nonviolent Action Team (GNAT), 309 Central Ave., Butner, NC 27509. 919.575.4283