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BIENNIAL REPORT OF THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE (OHSC), 2014–2015

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 OSHC also includes the Staff Physician and the Laboratory Safety Officer.

2. The OHSC met six times during 2014–2015. The minutes of each meeting are posted on the Intranet. A new Staff Physician was recruited as a staff member on a half-time position from May 2014.

A. General well-being

3. Upon their arrival at IARC, all newcomers (more than a hundred every year) receive 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 practice and must fill in a questionnaire on related issues.

4. The Committee was involved in the initial activities of the “programmist” for the design of the Nouveau Centre. A questionnaire was sent to all personnel to gather their wishes in terms of offices, laboratories and common areas. A summary was compiled in collaboration with the Staff Association Committee and the Administration. This information was included in a report where the Committee also made recommendations on elements such as temperature, light, noise, based on standards and regulations. This document was sent to the “programmist” in July 2014.

5. As several people presented health problems due to air dryness, humidity level measurements were taken at different levels of the three buildings and found to be between 15 to 30%, which is very low compared to comfort levels of 40 to 50%. The Administration stated that the installation of a global humidification system for the whole building is not possible due to regulations regarding the risk from exposure to legionella. Personnel should, on their own initiative, put green plants and containers with water in their offices to increase the humidity level. Artificial tears have been made available for personnel suffering from eye dryness.

6. The OHSC presented two requests to the Director and the Administration to improve personnel well-being. The first was the provision of a relaxation area; the use of the room next to the coffee machine area on the ground floor was suggested by the Director but the Staff Association Committee preferred to keep the current use for table tennis. The second was the provision of a new area dedicated to breastfeeding mothers for which arrangements were made to provide the required privacy and the necessary equipment was bought.

B. Laboratories

Risk assessment

7. Recognizing the need to improve Agency-wide risk assessment, the OHSC discussed and reviewed the current process of evaluation of potential exposure to dangerous substances at the workplace as well as the level, organization and dissemination of information associated to those chemical products. As a first step, work is being done to collect safety data sheets (SDS) of reagents and kits used in the laboratories. These SDS will be made available on the intranet in the very near future. The final objective is to categorize and store the information in a centralized database for the effective risk management of hazards.

8. A training course was held for new users of the autoclave of the L3 laboratory as requested by French regulations.

Radioprotection

9. The agreement to use radioisotopes was renewed in May 2014 for another five years by the “Autorité de Sûreté Nucléaire”. A modification was made in 2015 to include the new room used by the Biomarkers Group (BMA) after the transfer of their laboratories to the 13th floor of the Tower building.

10. The use of radioisotopes has now become very rare. Rules have been adapted accordingly and every person planning to use radioisotopes should inform the radiation safety officer in advance so that experimental conditions can be set up properly.

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) authorization

11. The agreement to use Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) was renewed in 2014 by the “Commission de Génie Génétique” of the “Ministère de l’Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche” for a five year period. This body verifies the proper installation, safe working conditions and proper waste disposal processes depending on the classification of the GMOs used.

Biobank

12. The facility has been equipped with cameras to monitor staff using the cryogenic rooms as there are areas which are not visible through the door window.

13. Transportation of liquid nitrogen has been reduced to a minimum (liquid nitrogen needed in experimental protocols) and rules have been implemented so that it is safe for personnel. Transport of liquid nitrogen in the lifts in the presence of personnel is no longer allowed.

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

14. The Committee regularly monitors working conditions and reminders of good laboratory practice are made to maintain a safe environment. The use of the red 'technical' lift is one important issue as it is used not only by laboratory personnel but also by technical staff from IARC and outside companies. Several levels of information and reminders were given in order to adhere to best practices and assure safe transportation of all personnel.

15. A test of all exhaust hoods, chemical hoods, biosafety cabinets and centrifuges was carried out in 2014, and the consequent repairs undertaken.

Incidents and accidents

16. An accident occurred in a laboratory with a robot needle stick containing DNA. Blood tests were done to verify the absence of contamination.

17. A person accidentally inhaled vapors (presumably hydrogen chloride) from the degradation of a chloroform solution kept in stock for a long time. Groups were asked to regularly tidy up their laboratories and a more regular collection of out-of-date or no longer used products was put in place.

18. An accident occurred when a student made a wrong move when pipetting Trizol and knocked over the bottle that was put on the bench. He was wearing a labcoat, gloves, and was working under an exhaust hood. Although he reacted correctly and very quickly, he had first and second degree burns which were tended in hospital.