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Salt Lake City, UT

Nuclear Watch of New Mexico
Santa Fe, NM

The Sunshine Project
Austin, TX

Coalition for a Safe Lab
Hamilton, MT

Physicians for Social Responsibility
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Tri-Valley CAREs
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**NATIONAL COALITION HAILS LITIGATION EFFORT TO CURB U.S.
BIOWEAPONS BOOM, CALLS FOR NATIONAL REVIEW**

A national coalition of watch dog groups across the United States applauds the legal challenge to the Department of Energy's expanded bioweapons programs filed in federal court today by coalition partners Nuclear Watch of New Mexico and Tri-Valley CAREs.

The Coalition of organizations was formed in response to the rapidly expanding biodefense program and its lack of transparency. While the coalition is not against defensive research on biological agents, it strongly believes that such efforts be conducted in a fully open environment that ensures public participation.

“This is an important step towards a rational re-evaluation of the U.S. biodefense boom,” said Edward Hammond of the Austin, TX based Sunshine Project. “The U.S. government is investing billions of taxpayer dollars in biodefense related research, but has no coordinated plan and insufficient mechanisms to ensure transparency and treaty compliance.”

In addition to expanded bioweapons efforts at the Department of Energy, an extensive expansion of similar research capabilities are being planned by the U.S. Army and the National Institutes of Allergies and Infectious Diseases. “These federal agencies are moving into our university systems, our symbols of free and creative thinking, and creating an environment of secrecy,” said Dr. Sujatha Byravan, Executive Director of the Cambridge-based Council for Responsible Genetics. “This will have a terrible impact on the generations-old academic custom of openness that has been a driving force behind scientific development.”

“The federal agencies pushing the bioweapons expansion are doing so while sacrificing basic public health needs,” argues Mary Wulff of the Hamilton, MT Coalition for A Safe Lab.

“Why don’t they spend the billions of dollars on research that would truly benefit all humanity, such as AIDs or tuberculosis?”

“There is an overwhelming and immediate need for a comprehensive examination of the U.S. biodefense program and the direction that it’s headed,” said Dr. Robert Gould, President of the Washington, DC based Physicians for Social Responsibility. “The U.S. is treading on very dangerous ground and steps must be taken before irreparable harm is done.”

The coalition has actively sought assurances from several universities across the nation, including Boston University, the University of Texas at Galveston, and the University of California at Davis, that no classified research would be conducted for the federal government at their facilities. The coalition has also been successful at increasing the level of public participation and public comment on a number of proposed biological research facilities, including those for Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories and Rocky Mountain Laboratories in Hamilton, Montana.