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AUGUST 25, 2014 - ASM STATEMENT: WHAT IS IN YOUR LABORATORY FREEZER?

Dear Colleague:

A series of recent events in microbiology laboratories have reinforced the importance of knowing all the microbes that exist in your lab. The ASM has already issued several statements urging microbiologists in teaching, research, and diagnostic laboratories to take all steps possible to guarantee biosafety, to protect themselves, their co-workers, and the broader public from microorganisms that can cause disease (Biosafety Statement: <http://www.asm.org/index.php/public-policy/93-policy/93014-biosafety-7-14> DURC Statement: <http://www.asm.org/index.php/public-policy/137-policy/documents/statements-and-testimony/93024-durc-7-31-14>).

Today as ASM President I want to reinforce this message and ask you to go one step further. Specifically, I ask all microbiologists to make sure that you and your colleagues know what they have in the lab (freezer, refrigerator, store room, etc). Simply put, I think it is good "laboratory housekeeping" to review what microbes we each have in the lab, inventory them, and use appropriate methods to deposit in an approved collection or destroy any cultures that are no longer needed by our labs. In this way we can each say that we know where things are and are working to provide a safe environment for researchers and students in microbiology labs. We also should consider making sure that someone else can access this information should we leave the laboratory. For principal investigators this would be especially useful in making sure we know what cultures our students leave behind, likewise a prudent safety practice is to make sure that department chairs and local IBCs know where potential pathogens are located.

There are also other potential benefits to this process. Reviewing what's in your freezer might provide space and save money if the newly found space means we no longer need to buy an additional storage unit. Also, remember that deep freezers are probably one of the more energy intensive pieces of laboratory equipment. Thus, any reduction in the number of freezers we need can make microbiology labs more energy efficient.

It is our understanding that the Administration and funding agencies will be undertaking initiatives to enhance laboratory biosafety. The ASM will keep you informed and post information at <http://www.asm.org/policy> as it becomes available.

Sincerely,

Timothy J. Donohue, Ph.D.
President, ASM

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