

"Meet MilliGen"
Spring Symposium

Advances in DNA and Peptide Synthesis

Agenda

- Chemical synthesis of large DNA fragments
- Base composition assay for synthetic DNA
- Chemical synthesis of end-labelled and modified oligonucleotides
- Comparison of Boc/Fmoc chemistries for peptide synthesis
- Continuous flow peptide synthesis
- Peptides and DNA analysis and purification

Speakers will include:

Dr. Gareth Priestley	(C.R.B.)
Dr. Paul Sheppard	(C.R.B.)
Dr. Eric Atherton	(C.R.B.)
Dr. Hubert Koester	(MilliGen)
Dr. Alex Bonner	(MilliGen)
Dr. Jack Johansen	(Millipore)

Locations and Dates

Boston, MA	April 9
Saddlebrook, NJ	April 13
Washington, D.C.	April 16
Research Triangle, NC	April 20
Chicago, IL	April 24
Columbus, OH	April 28
Toronto, Canada	April 30
Montreal, Canada	May 4
Houston, TX	May 11
St. Louis, MO	May 26*

*Coincides with Tenth American Peptide Symposium. Seminar from 1-4 p.m.

Seminars will run from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., unless otherwise noted, and will include a complimentary lunch. There is no charge, but space is limited. For reservations and details, call toll-free (800) 872-0071; in Massachusetts, (617) 275-5208.

MilliGen will also be conducting DNA/Peptide tutorials at the upcoming ASBC and FASEB meetings.

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MILITARY BIOTECH

COURT ORDERS DoD TO ASSESS IMPACT OF BIOLOGICAL DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The Department of Defense (DoD) was told in February by a U.S. District Court judge to prepare a comprehensive environmental impact statement for its biological defense research program, much of which involves applications of biotechnology to biological warfare (BW). The assessment is expected to take 21 months to complete.

The court order stems from a lawsuit brought last year by Jeremy Rifkin, his Foundation on Economic Trends (Washington, D.C.), and Neil Levitt, a former senior scientist with the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (Fort Detrick, MD). Although DoD did make several concessions, there is some disagreement over whether the settlement represents a significant victory for Rifkin. The anti-biotech activist asserts that there are hints of sinister activities within DoD's overall program.

DoD scientists retort that their research aims are legitimate and that Rifkin's meddling may hamper valuable efforts to combat dangerous, sometimes woefully neglected diseases. They also suggest that Rifkin's allegations are by now a familiar means for gaining publicity. Rifkin calls it his duty to slow DoD's progress—which he sees as leading inevitably toward weapons development—by being a "pain."

Rifkin and the other plaintiffs alleged last year that DoD was careless in conducting research on certain pathogens, and thus the whole BW program needs a thorough review for safety as well as improvements in security procedures. The DoD programs include developing pathogen detection systems, vaccines, and biological safety suits to protect against potential BW agents.

Top Defense Department officials have maintained that the U.S. follows the Geneva Conventions forbidding development and production of biological weapons, and thus all work being done is strictly for defensive purposes. DoD's research is conducted in many facilities across the country, with a sizable fraction of it being performed under contract in university settings.

Rifkin says that, because of the sprawling nature of the DoD programs, preparation of the environ-

mental impact statement for the whole BW program could take more than the allotted time. If that process becomes cumbersome, he adds, it may make BW work more trouble than it's worth for contract researchers.

In reaching a settlement with the Defense Department, Rifkin agreed to drop his inquiry into the alleged disappearance from Fort Detrick of a sample containing chikungunya virus. He also agreed not to challenge DoD by invoking the National Environmental Policy Act until after completion of the environmental impact statement.

Although some DoD scientists doubt the need for such a comprehensive review because they believe their laboratory practices are safe and environmentally sound, they view it as a potentially "worthwhile exercise" for proving their case in "the eyes of the public." However, they also say the suit has been an "embarrassment" because of its "implications of wrong doings," which they vigorously deny.

Despite some concern among DoD officials that the added paperwork burden will detract from research time and will be wasteful for researchers (including private contractors from small start-up companies), some observers question whether this part of the court decision represents much of a victory for Rifkin. It does not halt any current DoD activity. Instead, according to the court order, BW research programs may still be conducted so long as they comply with the National Institutes of Health Guidelines for Research Involving Recombinant DNA Molecules.

Ironically, Rifkin's actions could lead DoD into a more secretive posture—a possibility that already frustrates some scientists within the military system. "Right now everything we do is open, above board, and nothing is classified," says one Fort Detrick researcher. "I would hate to see [DoD] pull out the secrecy umbrella—after we worked to prevent that." If DoD eventually insists on classifying much of the material in the environmental impact statement, another observer notes, later efforts to use that material for delaying particular components of BW programs are more likely to prove fruitless.

—Jeffrey L. Fox