

Green Paper on detection technologies in the work of the law enforcement, customs and other security authorities /COM/2006/0474
Society for Applied Microbiology comments

The Society for Applied Microbiology (SfAM) welcomes the opportunity to comment on this very important Green Paper.

SfAM in particular is interested in detection technologies which are designed for detecting biological agents. We must stress that any such technologies must be able to detect biological agents not just in humans but also animals and indeed food sources.

A fundamental question should be asked and answered concerning the detection of biological agents: that is, what agents should the technology be able to detect? In addition, considerations for the specification of the tests must include rapidity, accuracy, specificity, sensitivity, portability, ease of use and of course a primary concern would be safety and in particular effective disposal after use. All the considerations just mentioned must of course be tested against biological agents from human, animal and food materials, and other environmental sources. SfAM membership has considerable knowledge of all these areas.

SfAM fully supports the Commission's initiative to focus investment on standardisation, research, certification and interoperability of detection systems and to transform research results into useful and applicable tools. This is an aim that many of our members understand very well in the area of applied microbiology.

SfAM agrees that common action and better co-ordination and information exchange is required across the European Union (EU) and other close allies e.g. United States of America. One suggestion for this to be more effective, is to organise a conference/workshop where technologies for detecting biological agents could be discussed. Attendees at such a meeting should include scientists (many working in the field of applied microbiology), industrial representatives who may have developed technologies on a commercial scale and representatives of law enforcement agencies.

In relation to design, manufacture and use of detection systems, The Green Paper discusses Testing and Certifying the quality of equipment and tools for detecting substances. When thinking about biological agents this may already be covered with the legislation governing the use of in vitro testing devices for human health in the EU which is covered by the In Vitro Diagnostic CE marking regulations which were introduced as mandatory throughout the EU from 2003. The green paper discusses the importance of communication. Recent experience with bioterrorism in the USA and in Europe with hospital acquired infections and disease spread by the food chain has shown the critical importance of getting the facts to the public as soon as possible in an understandable manner. SfAM has

been asked to handle communications by the EU network of excellence on zoonotic diseases – Med-Vet-Net - and is willing to help in developing a communication strategy.

Background on the Society for Applied Microbiology and the Biosciences Federation

The Society for Applied Microbiology (SfAM) is the oldest microbiological society in the United Kingdom and was founded in 1931. It is a learned society which has worldwide membership in many different areas of applied microbiology. These include academia, research, food, clinical, pharmaceutical, environmental, veterinary, soil and water industries. In addition, the Society also has a corporate grade of membership and has corporate members from a variety of industries including In Vitro Diagnostic Device manufacturers and suppliers.

SfAM is involved with Blackwell Scientific Publishers in producing three peer reviewed scientific journals (Journal and Letters in Applied Microbiology and Environmental Microbiology) a fourth journal (Microbial Biotechnology) is planned for launch in early 2008.

SfAM is a member of the Biosciences Federation and this response is submitted in partnership with them. The BSF (www.bsf.ac.uk) is a single authority representing the UK's biological expertise, providing independent opinion to inform public policy and promoting the advancement of the biosciences. The Federation was established in 2002, and is actively working to influence policy and strategy in biology-based research – including funding and the interface with other disciplines - and in school and university teaching.

It is also concerned about the translation of research into benefits for society, and about the impact of legislation and regulations on the ability of those working in teaching and research to deliver effectively.

The Federation brings together the strengths of 42 member organisations (plus two associate members), including the Institute of Biology which represents 40 additional affiliated societies. This represents a cumulative membership of over 65,000 individuals, covering the full spectrum of biosciences from physiology and neuroscience, biochemistry and microbiology, to ecology, taxonomy and environmental science.

The Biosciences Federation is a registered charity (no. 1103894) and the Chief Executive is Dr Richard Dyer OBE.

Tel: 01223 400181

Fax: 01223 246858

<http://www.bsf.ac.uk>