

OAS/CICTE IN-PERSON COURSES ON BIOSAFETY AND BIOSECURITY FOR SCIENTISTS AND LABORATORY PERSONNEL: PROMOTING TECHNICAL BIOSECURITY AND BIOSAFETY CAPABILITIES IN LATIN AMERICA



*Training in Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 7-11, 2023
22 professionals from Buenos Aires and 15 from other Provinces*

The last Comprehensive Review in the Latin American region performed by the 1540 Committee established pursuant UNSC (UN Security Council) resolution 1540 (2004), indicates that there is a low level of implementation of biosecurity measures in the region, even where high containment laboratories are built. Therefore, implementation of stronger legal and regulatory frameworks for biosafety and biosecurity in laboratories and research centers is an essential step to prevent accidents or intentional misuse of biological agents and toxins in the region.

A recent study developed by the National Consortium for the Study on Terrorism and Responses on Terrorism of the University of Maryland, indicates that while the scope of terrorist threats related to biosecurity in Latin America is relatively low, the number of laboratories and research centers in the region are growing and an incident could have significant impact on the region.

In response to this, the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism of the Organization of American States ('OAS/CICTE') has implemented a project to further biosafety and biosecurity in Latin America entitled "In support of strengthening biological safety and security in Latin American in line with the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1540 (2004)", generously funded and supported by the European Union (CFSP/2019/24/BIOSAFSEC LA OAS).



Taking advantage of the extensive experience of OAS/CICTE in assisting regional States in areas related to the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, this project's aim is to further the efforts of national authorities in the region to establish and enforce



*Training in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, July 17-21, 2023
Professionals from: 12 laboratories, 7 hospitals, 4 health government agencies
and 11 academia*

effective measures to prevent the proliferation of biological weapons through the delivery of technical assistance and cooperation to eight countries in the Americas. Among the activities taking place in the context of the project, OAS/CICTE organized three- to five-day-long national trainings across the region to help strengthen the development of biosafety and biosecurity capacities among technical experts who work in

facilities where biological agents and toxins are handled. These trainings took place in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay.

One of the main focus of the EU-funded project is delivering in-person workshops. In the last six months, OAS/CICTE carried out seven face-to-face training courses for laboratory personnel and scientists from the life science fields. These workshops were designed to increase awareness of bio-risks and to strengthen knowledge on the challenges concerning biological safety and security. These courses took place, respectively, in Asuncion (Paraguay) from 17 to 21 April, Panama City (Panama) from 5 to 9 June, Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) from 17 to 21 July, Bogotá (Colombia) from 24 to 28 July, Buenos Aires (Argentina) from 7 to 11 August, Montevideo (Uruguay) from 8 to 11 August, and Santiago (Chile) from 4 to 8 September. On average, some 30 participants from public or private institutions and research centers attended each of these courses.



*Training in Santiago, Chile, September 4-6, 2023
23 professionals from Buenos Aires and 13 from other regions*

Building on an agenda drafted by the OAS/CICTE team, representatives from various states collaborated and helped construct training which reflected their interests and challenges, as appropriate. In this regard, some states demonstrated how they implement biosafety and biosecurity measures and in particular one state requested, additional training, including two one day conferences on the following topics: (1) strategic trade control of biological materials and (2) drafting a national response plan to address

intentional biological incidents, including the United Nations Secretary-General's Mechanism for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons (UNSGM).

During those training sessions, debates took place regarding the appropriate scope of measures to physically protect biological agents; the importance of compiling an updated inventory of valuable biological materials; best practices used to protect information effectively; and discussion on the relevance of implementing personnel reliability measures, and transport security.”



*Training in Ciudad de Panama, Panama, June 5-9, 2023
Professionals from: 4 laboratories, 7 hospitals, 9 health government agencies and 9 academia*

The training covered a broad range of biosafety topics including selecting safety cabinets; correctly using disinfectants and other sterilization methods; and employing the best uses of personal protective equipment. Other topics included dual-use research of concern; ethical behavior in life science; and designing effective oversight

mechanisms. In addition, several tabletop exercises on bio-risk management were employed during the training. Participants acknowledged the positive outcomes of these meetings and welcomed the practical dimensions of the training. They also emphasized the need to continue to train younger professionals as they enter life science careers.

Different interactive techniques were used during the training and printed training material was distributed to reinforce the learning process. Participants were also encouraged to coordinate and network among themselves. To support these efforts, OAS/CICTE created a "network of biosafety and biosecurity professionals" composed of the participants who attended the training. This network will provide a forum going forward to share experiences and attend future virtual related activities. To improve future training, participants suggested developing and implementing additional activities, including in smaller cities away from capitals, to enhance the impact at the national level.

In addition, participants from the region highlighted the importance of bringing together government authorities, key representatives from the private sector, civil society, and academia, to raise awareness and build greater biological safety- and security-related capacities throughout the Americas. A common concern identified among participants from the various training courses was the belief that there is a low level of awareness in terms of



*Training in Bogota, Colombia, July 24-28, 2023
Professionals from: 15 laboratories, 9 health government agencies and 2 academia*

implementing laboratory biosecurity measures. They also noticed the importance of increasing the number laboratory biorisk assessments.

It is expected that the project under way will find support from donors to continue and that the training offered can be offered again as a way of ensuring continuous instruction of current and future professionals. Indeed, it would be useful to expand the number of countries engaged in these training courses. It was also observed that trainees play a crucial role in helping to strengthen existing national legal frameworks to comply with international obligations and standards. As a result, it is key to continue to develop strategies to promote a stable network of all key stakeholders involved in biological safety and security. OAS/CICTE is committed to pursuing these efforts, with the engagement of all countries in the region, and with the support of partners able and willing to reinforce these important achievements in the years to come.



*Training in Montevideo, Uruguay, August 8-11, 2023
Professionals from: 12 laboratories, 2 hospitals, 9 health government agencies and 9 academia*

More information:

<https://www.oas.org/en/sms/cicte/prog-proliferation-weapons.asp>
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