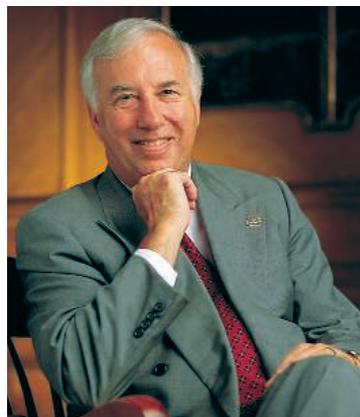


Schools Fear Impact of Proposed License Changes

Academic and industry scientists are fighting proposed changes to export-control rules that could restrict some foreign nationals from using sensitive equipment when they do research in the United States. But federal officials say opponents are vastly overestimating the impact of the changes on the research enterprise.

The rules, enforced by the Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS), apply to persons from countries that the U.S. government says pose national security threats. The list includes China, India, and Russia, which are major sources of U.S. scientific talent. Universities have traditionally believed that an exemption for basic research in the rules applied to them. But in March 2004, the Department of Commerce Inspector General (IG) noted that the use of export-controlled equipment for research was not exempt, meaning that universities would need licenses to employ foreign nationals in certain research projects.

Based on the IG's recommendations, the bureau clarified the license requirement. It also proposed changing the criterion for granting a so-called deemed export license from the foreign national's country of citizenship to his or her country of birth. That change is intended to block foreign nationals from subverting the rules by establishing citizenship in another country not on the danger list. The changes, which were published in the 28 March *Federal Register*, are open for public comment until 27 May.



The price of security. Maryland's Daniel Mote says rule changes could cost his university \$1.5 million.

BIS officials predict that the number of researchers requiring licenses will be very small. But Daniel Mote, president of the University of Maryland, College Park, says his school will need to spend \$1.5 million to find out, that is, to classify research equipment on campus into different categories of export-controlled items and monitor their use. For practical reasons, he says, institutions may decide "when in doubt, apply for a license." One way for the government to reduce the regulatory burden on campuses, Mote said at a 6 May meeting at the National Academies, would be to grant international students and postdoctoral scholars a deemed export license when they receive visas. ▶

MICROBIOLOGY

Détente Declared on NIH Biodefense Funding

Microbiologists concerned that the buildup of biodefense research could be hurting basic research are celebrating a small victory after meeting with top National Institutes of Health (NIH) officials last week. Both sides agreed they should stop quibbling over grants data, and instead, NIH and the microbiology community should look at what scientific areas are falling through the cracks.

"These are positive developments," says Richard Ebright, a microbiologist at Rutgers University in Piscataway, New Jersey, and a leading critic of NIH's biodefense spending.

The meeting marked a change in tone for NIH officials, who until now have defended funding decisions that more than 700 microbiologists questioned in an open letter (*Science*, 4 March, pp. 1396 and 1409). The letter claimed that giving the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) \$1.5 billion more for biodefense has diverted microbiologists from studies of model organisms and non-biodefense pathogens. As proof, the authors noted a sharp drop since 2000 in grants funded by the two main study sections reviewing those proposals.

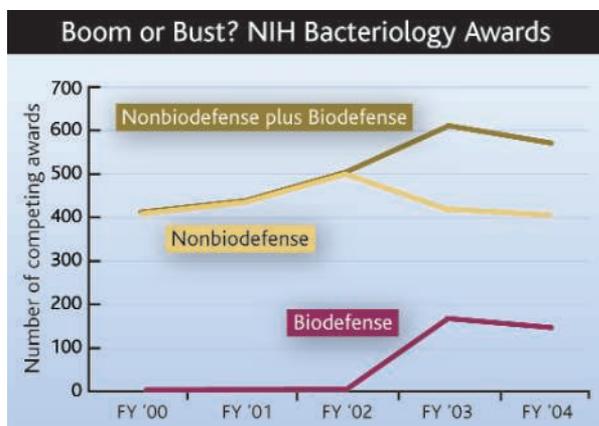
NIH Director Elias Zerhouni and NIAID Director Anthony Fauci initially said that non-biodefense grants rose through 2003 at NIAID (*Science*, 1 April, p. 49). Since then, NIH has analyzed bacteriology grants across all 27 institutes, and NIH's Sally Rockey presented the data last week at a closed meeting with a half-dozen outside scientists including leaders

2003, points out that NIH found a decline even though it used an "extremely inclusive" definition that picked up grants in areas such as psychosocial research. But NIH extramural research chief Norika Ruiz Bravo insists that the drop coincides with a reduction in all disciplines as NIH's budget growth slowed after a 5-year doubling. "Without biodefense, the picture would be much bleaker" for microbiologists, Ruiz Bravo says. Even NIH's critics agree that it's hard to say if there has been a tradeoff. "The numbers are all so convoluted, it's like the blind guys feeling the elephant," says Stanley Maloy of San Diego State University in California, another meeting participant.

NIH and ASM are now planning a workshop to probe further. "The bigger issue is, what are the trends in the field, the gaps, what needs to be done," says Ruiz Bravo. That idea pleases ASM, which has worried about a "perceived decline in interest" in basic microbiology for 10 years, says ASM president James Tiedje of Michigan State University in East Lansing. "This workshop is an important goal for us."

The microbiologists' letter suggested broadening the definition of biodefense to include work on model organisms. But one signer, Barry Bloom of Harvard University, says Congress will expect NIH to spend its money on potential bioterror agents. As for where the money will come from, Bloom says, "it's a matter of priorities" for the entire NIH budget.

—JOCELYN KAISER



Numbers game. Some scientists blame a drop in nonbiodefense bacteriology grants on the rise in biodefense funding. NIH disagrees.

from the American Society for Microbiology (ASM) in Washington, D.C. The new data show a roughly 17% drop in nonbiodefense grants in 2003, the first year of the influx of biodefense funding (see graph, above).

Ebright, who has calculated a 40% drop for

Détente Declared on NIH Biodefense Funding

Jocelyn Kaiser

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