

TO: Members of the Boston City Council
FROM: Sheldon Krinsky, Professor, Tufts University
DATE: April 20, 2004
SUBJECT: Boston University's proposed BL-4 Laboratory

I wish to be on record as opposing the proposed BL-4 bioterrorism laboratory planned in Boston's South End adjacent to Roxbury.

In 1976 I was a member of a citizen's committee convened by the City Manager of Cambridge at the request of the City Council to investigate and make recommendations about the new genetics research that was being planned at Harvard and MIT. In the recommendations of the citizen's committee we agreed unanimously that there should not be a level four biological research facility in a densely populated area like Cambridge. We recommended that a level 4 biological laboratory should be prohibited for recombinant DNA research. Our concern, however, was with the organisms used in a level 4 facility, whether or not the research involved genetic engineering. There was no opposition expressed by the universities in Cambridge over the committee's recommendation and the subsequent city ordinance prohibiting a level 4 biological research facility.

There will always be debates over how safe such facilities are. But they are not failsafe. Even the best designed laboratories are subject to accidents and releases. The Inspector General of the US Department of Energy wrote in February 2001 on activities involving biological select agents that the "Department's activities lacked sufficient Federal oversight, consistent policy, and standardized implementing procedures, resulting in the potential for greater risk to workers and possibly others from exposure to biological select agents..."

It is ironic that the Supreme Court has ruled that community standards should apply to decisions about sexually explicit movies, plays and publications, and yet the City of Boston has thus far failed to apply community standards to an issue that is far more important to the public health of the community. I suggest that the Council establish an independent citizen's committee to review the risks and benefits of locating a level 4 facility in its proposed location and let that committee study the issues, as we had done in Cambridge on two occasions, and make recommendations to the City Council and the Mayor.