



Building Power Together for Environmental Justice

Media Release

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Community Rallies to Ban Bioterror Lab

Demands Funding for Public Health, Housing and Other Community Needs

[Boston, MA] More than 1000 people will march through Boston's South End to demand a ban on a proposed bioterror research lab. Participants will march past a public housing development and homes within a block of the site where Boston University (BU) plans to build the federally-funded high security lab. Members of the coalition opposing the lab say that the bioterror lab is too risky to be placed in an urban center. If built, the lab would experiment with incurable diseases that could be used as bioweapons agents, including anthrax, ebola, and the plague. The coalition includes a diverse mix of local residents, peace activists, and scientists.

Community residents said that their struggle is an example of the local impacts of misguided federal policies. They demand that the \$127 million in federal funds for the project be redirected towards the community's public health and housing needs instead. The coalition also demands that the federal government stop imposing such unwanted and dangerous facilities on low income communities of color, such as the South End and Roxbury.

Opposition to the lab is led by a local resident group called the Safety Net and a Roxbury-based environmental justice group Alternatives for Community & Environment. **Dolly Battle**, a Roxbury resident and Safety Net leader says, "We already have an unfair share of the City's trash facilities and diesel bus and truck depots. And we suffer from the highest rates of asthma in the state. Now this bioterror lab. No way! This is another example of environmental racism."

Former State Representative and South End resident **Mel King** stated that "It is obscene to spend hundreds of millions of our tax dollars on bioterror, when we have more than 50,000 children in Massachusetts without health insurance and state funding was eliminated for school nurses."

Among the lab's critics are more than 165 scientists, physicians, and academics. According to **Professor David Ozonoff** of Boston University School of Public Health, "this facility, rather than protecting us from bioterrorism, has the real potential for making us less safe. We've already

seen that the anthrax used in the post 9/11 mail attacks came from just such a US laboratory. More recently, an outbreak of SARS in China was caused by a lab worker who got infected and transmitted the disease to others.” **Professor Jonathan King**, an MIT biologist, stated that “the location of a high risk bioterrorism facility in a densely populated area violates all standards and experience for siting such facilities in a manner that protects the public health and welfare.”

Some experts believe that the more than \$5.6 billion being spent on the Bush Administration’s Bioshield initiative and the building of more research labs will only make the country more unsafe. Biochemist **Richard Ebright**, of Rutgers University’s Waksman Institute of Microbiology, believes that “The simplest, most likely, path for a sub-state adversary, such as Al Qaeda, to acquire bioweapons capability is by penetration of a biodefense research project in a US laboratory.”

The event will feature a skit where people in hazmat suits playing the role of BU and the lab’s proponents lose a tug of war over a large check with members of the community.

Protesters call upon the Mayor, City Council, and all the national leaders at the DNC to help protect local communities from the misguided federal policies that have given birth to the proposed bioterror lab. City Councilor **Chuck Turner** of Roxbury stated that “it is time to direct our funds away from the war machine and back towards the real needs of the community, such as health, housing, education.” With Councilors Felix Arroyo and Maura Hennigan, he is sponsoring a City ordinance to be debated this fall that would ban all BL4 labs in Boston.

Also speaking in support of the community was Congressman **Dennis Kucinich**, who said that “The construction of the bioterror lab, while providing little to no benefit to the residents of Roxbury and South End, threatens the health of residents by potentially poisoning the air they breathe and the water they drink. The money used to construct this facility could be better spent on funding public health for low income communities like this one. It has always been my priority to restrict wasteful spending on weapons and weapons research in favor of initiatives that improve the quality of life ordinary Americans, and I will continue fighting for these principles.”

The Campaign to Stop the Bioterror Lab is led by the Safety Net and ACE. Safety Net brings together Roxbury residents to advocate for sustainable and equitable development. ACE is a Roxbury-based environmental justice group. For more information on the campaign, please visit www.ace-ej.org.

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