

# **NADC Waste Disposal Evaluation**

## **Scientific Review Panel Charter**

*(August 23, 2006)*

### **Background:**

On May 4, 2006, the City of Ames received allegations that wastes from areas at NADC with animals challenged with prions were not properly treated prior to discharge to the City wastewater plant. On May 8, 2006, representatives from the City of Ames and USDA met to discuss the concerns and develop plans to address the issues. USDA and the City of Ames agreed to convene an expert panel to review scientific information about deactivation of prions and assess practices used at NADC to treat liquid wastes from areas where animals with prions are housed and handled that enter the Ames wastewater treatment system.

### **Project:**

To evaluate four main issues related to the handling and disposal of potentially prion-contaminated materials in wastewater from the National Animal Disease Center. Prions for the purposes of this document are defined as specific proteins that are abnormally shaped and can cause transmissible diseases associated with the allegations.

1. Identify scientifically accepted methods for effectively destroying prions.
2. Assess the concerns raised regarding NADC's current and past methods for the destruction of prions.
3. Determine the risk posed to humans and the environment from the current, as well as previous, methods for the destruction of prions utilized at NADC.
4. If remediation is needed, provide scientifically sound approaches for corrective action(s) that may be taken.

### **Deliverables:**

Prepare a written report that documents the panel's findings for the four main issues being evaluated. Participate in presentations of the report to the City of Ames, USDA, and the general public.

### **Boundaries and Parameters:**

The following parameters should be observed by the panel.

1. The purpose of this panel is to evaluate potential prion discharges into wastewater. Other issues not related to prion discharges are outside the scope of this panel's activities. If other issues are identified by the panel during its evaluation, this information should be provided to the co-coordinators of this evaluation (see Panel Process below). Except as it relates directly to the issue of prion discharges, the panel should not spend time evaluating NADC's internal administrative or personnel issues.
2. Similarly, this panel is not charged with trying to determine if any laws or regulations were violated. This panel's work is to focus on the technical issues surrounding potentially prion-contaminated waste disposal practices.
3. While it is desirable to have the final panel report express a unanimous opinion, for some issues there may be dissenting opinions. Where appropriate, the final report may include discussions about differing opinions.
4. Minutes, meeting summaries and the final report will be public information and available upon request.
5. Conclusions should be based on peer-reviewed science whenever available. Considering the nature of this area of research, peer-reviewed work may not be available for every issue. In these cases, panel members may be asked to provide information that provides a benchmark for what other research institutions are doing. In some instances, panel members may be asked to simply offer their best professional judgment. Professional opinions should be identified as such and the basis for the opinion should be expressed.

6. Panel members are acting as experts in their fields and are not speaking as agents of their agencies or universities.

**Starting and Ending Date:**

The panel's activities begin with an initial on-site panel meeting to be held as soon as possible. The panel's final report should be completed within 90 days.

**Information and Knowledge:**

Panel members will be given access to all available information sources related to prion waste disposal at NADC. This includes interviews with NADC administration, researchers, animal care staff, and environmental health and biosafety staff. The City Manager of Ames and USDA-ARS's Midwest Area Director have pledged their support to provide access to City and NADC personnel, information, facilities, and documentation applicable to this evaluation to panel members. Panel members may also use public records available through relevant federal, state and local agencies.

**Panel Process**

The entire process of this evaluation will be under the co-coordination of Mr. Tom Neumann of the City of Ames and Dr. Steven Shafer of USDA-ARS. Mr. Neumann and Dr. Shafer will approve and facilitate the panel's access to personnel, records, facilities, and information needed by the panel. The panel will communicate with the City and USDA exclusively through the co-coordinators. Mr. Neumann and Dr. Shafer may observe any of the panel's activities and may clarify the panel's charge if needed; however, Mr. Neumann and Dr. Shafer are not members of the panel and will have no role in the panel's deliberations or development of its conclusions.

All written communications to Mr. Neumann must be copied to Dr. Shafer, and vice-versa. Verbal communications should involve both co-coordinators whenever possible.

Panel members will develop their own methods for conducting the evaluation. All panel members should be present for all meetings; participation via conference call will be acceptable if circumstances prohibit travel.

The City and USDA strongly recommend that the panel select a chairperson early in the process. The panel may define the responsibilities of the chair, but one recommended role for the chair would be to serve as the focal point for communication between the panel and the co-coordinators.

The panel's meetings will be announced in advance and open to the public. Mr. Neumann and Dr. Shafer will arrange for public notices. We anticipate a minimum of two meetings. During the first meeting, the panel will be instructed on its charge by Mr. Neumann and Dr. Shafer; select a chairperson (suggested); and establish its methods. The last meeting should be held no more than 90 days later, during which the panel will develop its conclusions based on information it has gathered.

A period of time (e.g., 30 minutes) may be provided at the end of each public meeting for public comment. Panel members will not be required to respond to public comments.

*IMPORTANT: Federal regulations for this panel require that the panel or any subset of its members may not engage in deliberations outside a publicly accessible meeting.*

"Deliberations" are verbal or written discussions intended to arrive at consensus or conclusions.

In addition to these publicly accessible meetings, the panel may perform preparatory work during which information will be gathered through interviews, site visits, document review, etc.. Preparatory work will be coordinated through Mr. Neumann and Dr. Shafer and

conducted by the full panel. Preparatory work will not be open to the public. Per federal regulations, preparatory work may not include deliberations as defined above; they are restricted to information-gathering.

Any questions that arise outside meetings or preparatory work must be forwarded in writing (email preferable) to *both* co-coordinators (Mr. Neumann and Dr. Shafer). If such questions need to be addressed by an employee of the City or NADC, the appropriate co-coordinator will facilitate the communication.

Appropriate secretarial support will be provided to the panel for each meeting and for preparation of the final report.

### **Individual Roles**

Co-Coordinators (roles described above; present at all meetings and as needed for consultation): Tom Neumann (City of Ames; alternate John Dunn); Steve Shafer (USDA)

Technical Resources for Facilities (routine information on facilities; available for all meetings and as needed for consultation): John Dunn (City of Ames wastewater treatment plant); Diana Whipple (NADC).

Panel Members (primary charge); Alwynelle Ahl (Michigan State University), Ermias Belay (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), Jim Colbert (Iowa State University), Linda Detwiler (VA-MD Regional College of Veterinary Medicine), Robert Ellis (Colorado State University), Fran Kremer (US Environmental Protection Agency), Katherine McMahon (University of Wisconsin), Robert Rohwer (Veterans' Administration Medical Center). The quorum required for a panel meeting is any five members present in person or via conference call.

Observer: Byron Rippke (USDA-APHIS).

### **Reporting Process:**

The City of Ames has established an Internet web page for the dissemination of information related to the panel's work. Panel agendas and meeting summaries will be posted on this site. This web page is hosted by the City of Ames, and is located at <http://www.city.ames.ia.us/waterweb/nadc/nadc.htm>. In addition, printed copies will be available to the public through the City Manager's Office and the Water and Pollution Control Department's administrative office.

Any dissemination of information from the panel to the press during the evaluation process will be through the co-coordinators. Panel members will defer all media contacts to these individuals until the conclusion of the panel's evaluation and submission of the final report.

After the final meeting, the panel will make a concluding presentation that will be open to the public. At the conclusion of the presentation, the panel will be dissolved.

### **Panel Expenses**

All panel expenses are being covered through the USDA. Expenses for additional resources must be approved in advance by the USDA.