

## ***GERMS GONE WILD:***

### **TOP TEN REASONS TO WORRY ABOUT BIODEFENSE**

The expansion of biodefense after the 2001 anthrax attacks has greatly increased the likelihood of similar insider attacks (what the FBI says occurred in 2001) and of accidents. Here's why:

**(1) Huge proliferation of new high-risk labs:** Over 1100 new labs (a sevenfold increase) in the US since 2001—possibly hundreds more.

**(2) Who's keeping track?--**No one in the government, the Government Accountability Office said in 2007.

**(3) Lots of new, inexperienced researchers:** 15,000 plus—most of them never having worked with bioweapons agents before 2001.

**(4) Safety regulators missing in action:** Many labs not regulated at all; the rest get minimal attention. The labs are essentially regulating themselves, the GAO said in 2007.

**(5) Risky research:** Breeding antibiotic resistance into existing bioweapons agents; recreating the 1918 flu; creating deadly forms of the bird flu that spread easily between people.

**(6) Accidents happen, regularly:** Technologies fail; people ignore routine safety procedures; infected researchers typically go undiagnosed for weeks.

**(7) Secrecy/deception:** The labs and government agencies which regulate them keep accidents from the public, spin problems when they occur, and blandly portray labs as having no risks.

**(8) Conflict of interest.** The government agencies involved in regulation all operate dangerous labs themselves.

**(9) Money breeds prevarication:** The sevenfold increase in biodefense funding after 2001 gave birth to a “biodefense complex” determined to keep the funding levels high, and therefore devoted to hyping the fears of bioterrorism.

**(10) Waste—“a dog chasing its tail”:** Over \$60 billion spent since 2001 on repetitive research--trying futilely to create magic bullets against a score of bioweapons agents; creating new agents that then require new “countermeasures”; draining money from important public health research and our ailing public health infrastructure.