

JUL 27 2009



Open Column

Biosafety column's claims inaccurate

BY GEORGE STEWART

Saturday, July 25, 2009

It is understood by most that editorial columns differ from news articles in that they are "opinions" and as such do not have to meet the same standards of accuracy. Ken Midkiff appears to be someone who does not let facts get in the way of a story.

His op-ed piece in yesterday's paper, "MU biosafety lab on shaky ground," is fear mongering and inaccurate.

He claims that "one end" of the MU Regional Biocontainment Laboratory, MU-RBL "is subsiding much faster than the other one," which is not true. His claim that this has resulted in pressure alarms going off frequently is also not true. The laboratories are under negative pressure, one of the many safety features they possess. There are *no* pressure stability issues at the MU-RBL.

After the building was constructed, the systems maintaining the pressure differentials were extensively tested and, as part of the testing, were deliberately failed to ensure that alarm and back-up systems operated properly. All of these systems are operating properly.

Ken Midkiff also claims that "officials who operate and manage the lab have advised the building denizens to ignore the alarm." Again, this is an untrue and outrageous statement.

What Ken fails to mention — and again why let facts stand in the way of a good rant — is that there are no BSL-3 agents in the MU-RBL at the current time. Regulatory oversight of biocontainment facilities includes not only local oversight (by MU) but also must pass federal inspections before work with these biosafety Level 3 organisms can begin. We are still in this extensive evaluation period.

Biosafety laboratories, such as the MU-Regional Biocontainment Laboratory, have an outstanding record of safety. It is vitally important to the public health of the citizens of the United States that research on these pathogenic organisms continue to develop needed vaccines and therapeutics. The real threat to the citizens of Mid-Missouri is fear mongering perpetuated by editorialists who do not bother to check the facts when they opine.

George C. Stewart is McKee Professor of Microbial Pathogenesis and director of the MU Regional Biocontainment Laboratory at the University of Missouri.

This article was published on page A4 of the Saturday, July 25, 2009 edition of The Columbia Daily Tribune.



Tribune Column

MU biosafety lab on shaky ground

Friday, July 24, 2009

I'll bet you didn't know there's a small lab on the University of Missouri campus that experiments on some of the deadliest airborne germs and viruses around. It is not a Biosafety Level 4 (BSL 4) lab such as the one that MU and Columbia officials were pushing for out on New Haven Road. BSL 4 labs deal with diseases — ebola, hoof-and-mouth, Marburg hemorrhagic fever, West Nile — for which there are no known cures.

That BSL 4 lab is set to be constructed and foisted upon the mostly unknowing citizens of Manhattan, Kan. Public opposition was cited by the Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of Agriculture as the reason for not seriously considering the Columbia site. If it had been up to MU and Columbia staff, it would be sited here and any leaks would likely mean we'd all die.

But the BSL 3 lab at MU has escaped much community attention even though it poses very serious threats to public health. A BSL 3 lab has several "fail-safe" features, including shower-in shower-out, negative pressure, workers required to wear "space suits," sealed rooms, sealed containers, alarm system (in the event of "breaches") and so forth. A BSL 3 lab incorporates most of the safety features of a BSL 4 lab, the primary difference being that the safety features at a BSL 4 lab are enhanced. Another difference is that BSL 4 labs deal with all types of disease-causing organisms (albeit ones for which there is no cure), while MU's BSL 3 lab deals primarily with ones that are conducted through the air.

Feel safe? Well, don't. Most buildings constructed in Columbia undergo a period of "settling," as the weight of the building presses into the earth and the bedrock is way down deep. For most of these buildings, the settling — or subsidence — is fairly uniform.

Not so with the BSL 3 lab at MU. It is a new building, and it is subsiding. Although it has all the safety features called for in such a laboratory, it seems that one end is subsiding much faster than the other one. The alarm system is quite sensitive, detects this abnormality and sounds off, alerting those who work in the facility (one end is a "normal" research lab) that there's something wrong somewhere.

And therein lies the problem. Because of the abnormal subsidence, the alarm goes off frequently — sometimes several times a day. Rather than evacuate the building, which the safety procedures call for, officials who operate and manage the lab have advised the building denizens to ignore the alarm.

There are two problems with this: In the event of a real breach, such as a crack in a wall, roof leakage from storm damage or some such thing, residents of the building would assume it is just another false alarm. Also, the unequal subsidence needs to be dealt with because that in itself can cause cracking and air leakage.

In short, the BSL 3 lab should be closed, and all those nasty bugs safely taken back to where they came from until such time as the alarm sounds only in the event that there is a genuine safety issue. Although it is understandable that false alarms should be ignored, the people in the new building never know whether the alarm is false or real.

Ken Midkiff is Osage Group conservation chairman and author of "The Meat You Eat" and "Not a Drop to Drink." You can reach him via e-mail at editor@tribmail.com.

This article was published on page A4 of the Friday, July 24, 2009 edition of The Columbia Daily Tribune.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Curators approve appropriations request to state

By Michelle Pais

July 24, 2009 | 11:59 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — **To address an almost 10,000-student increase in enrollment over the past decade, the UM System Board of Curators is requesting \$8.5 million from the state in operations funding for the 2011 fiscal year.** It is part of a much larger appropriations request to be submitted to the state in August.

From 2000 to 2008, the four-campus system saw a 25 percent increase in enrollment, or about 9,800 students, according to board documents.

"With that increase comes a large strain on a lot of the resources that the university has," said Jennifer Hollingshead, spokeswoman for the UM System.

The board, which met Friday via teleconference, approved a core operations request of \$451.5 million, the bulk of which covers salaries. Other operating requests include \$43.6 million for health care and programs the university administers on behalf of the state, such as the Missouri Institute of Mental Health and the Missouri Kidney Program.

Overall, operations requests were 14.8 percent more than last year. UM System President Gary Forsee emphasized that the board shouldn't shy away from requesting the true fiscal needs of the university.

"The state revenue picture into the new fiscal year continues to be a bleak picture. ... The forecast is going to require us to continue to be vigilant with our programs and expenditures," Forsee told the curators.

All nine curators were either on the phone or present in the conference at University Hall, including Wayne Goode of St. Louis and David Bradley of St. Joseph, who were appointed to the board in June by Gov. Jay Nixon. Goode and Bradley, as well as

student representative Laura Confer, who is a non-voting member of the board, attended an orientation for new curators on Thursday.

The board voted unanimously to request \$528.8 million for capital projects to improve building rehabilitation and construction. In addition, curators are requesting \$45 million for the State Historical Society of Missouri.

At MU, a first-tier request includes almost \$50.4 million in state money to renovate College of Engineering building Lafferre Hall, according to board documents. A second-tier request is almost \$77.7 million to build a School of Music Facility/Performing Art Center. A third-tier request is almost \$34.3 million to renovate the Arvarh E. Strickland Hall, formally known as the General Classroom Building. In each case, state money would be supplemented by other funds.

In its budget request, the board will emphasize that funding of Lewis and Clark projects are the top priority for capital improvements, Nikki Krawitz, UM system vice president for finance and administration, said during the teleconference. Moving and expanding Ellis Fischel Cancer Center is one of these projects, totaling about \$31 million, Krawitz said.

At a future meeting, the board will look at a comprehensive analysis of university health-care facilities, board chairman Bo Fraser stated in his report.



UM lists top priorities for facility upgrades

By Janese Heavin Friday, July 24, 2009

The University of Missouri will ask lawmakers next session to appropriate \$261.5 million for top-priority facility projects, including \$34 million for needs deemed "critical."

Additionally, the system has outlined second-priority projects that would require \$160 million from the state and a third-tier list with a request for \$107 million.

During a teleconference meeting this morning, the Board of Curators unanimously approved the request for capital allocations, which would be included in the state's fiscal year 2011 budget.

Top priorities include \$50.4 million to renovate and add to Lafferre Hall for the College of Engineering on the Columbia campus and

\$5 million to upgrade the Missouri Rehabilitation Center in Columbia.

On a second-priority list is a request for \$77.6 million to construct a new performing arts center in Columbia, which would house the School of Music along with a 1,000-seat concert hall and 300-seat recital hall.

The third-tier list includes

\$34 million to renovate the Arvarh E. Strickland Building at MU.

UM System President Gary Forsee acknowledged that the facility wish list comes amid dreary state funding forecasts. But asking for that money, he said, at least creates an awareness of needs and what it takes to keep the four campuses up to par.

"We have to be sure we submit needs that are reflective" of the goals of the system, Forsee said. "If we back off, that does nothing to highlight to the state the importance of higher education."

The "critical" projects are maintenance and repairs that have been put off and need immediate attention, said Nikki Krawitz, vice resident for finance and administration. Of the total, \$17.9 million would be allocated for repairs across the Columbia campus.

"Our academic buildings are in dire need of repair," Board of Curators Chairman Bo Fraser of Columbia said. "We depend upon state resources to repair and renovate these buildings that are critical to the core mission of the university."

Forsee stressed, though, that before lawmakers spend money on the new projects, the state first needs to release money for pending construction, including the Ellis Fischel Cancer Center. The General Assembly approved those projects during the 2008 legislative session using money from the sale of Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority assets. Gov. Jay Nixon has since withheld funds for Ellis Fischel and other MOHELA-funded projects.

The new facilities list also is separate from the construction projects that will be funded with the \$332 million the system issued last week in tax-exempt bonds and bonds from the federal stimulus package.

Those projects include residential halls and health facilities, which generate revenues for the system.

In addition to the request for capital appropriations, the system is asking for an additional \$67 million from the state for general operations. That includes \$19 million to fund, in part, compensation increases and an additional \$8.5 million to adjust for enrollment growth.

Reach Janese Heavin at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jheavin@columbiatribune.com.

This article was published on page A14 of the Friday, July 24, 2009 edition of The Columbia Daily Tribune.



New curators ready to play advocate role

By Janese Heavin Friday, July 24, 2009

Among a slew of technical duties, University of Missouri curators also have a role to cheerlead on behalf of the university system.

UM System President Gary Forsee stressed that advocacy role during a five-hour orientation for new Curators Wayne Goode and David Bradley yesterday. Forsee kicked off the session by highlighting the importance of reminding Missourians, especially lawmakers, how relevant the system is to the state.

Gov. Jay Nixon tapped Goode and Bradley to serve on the Board of Curators this month, with terms ending in 2015. They spent most of their orientation yesterday learning about system finances in preparation for their first executive meeting this morning.

Goode, a St. Louis Democrat, is a former state senator who served as Nixon's transition budget director after the November election. Because he has broader experience with state finances, Goode said he knows lawmakers might not be able to fund everything on the system's wish list.

"I won't be there asking for things I know they can't do," he said. "But when occasion calls for me to fight for legislation, certainly I'm willing to do that."

Goode said he still personally knows quite a few senators and wouldn't mind making a phone call or two on behalf of the system when appropriate.

Bradley, a Republican, is the publisher for the News-Press and Gazette Co., which owns several newspapers in northwest Missouri and Kansas. His media background gives him a "good overview of what's going on in the world," Bradley said. "I have a fairly good perspective of how things work and how higher education fits into the world."

Bradley vowed, however, to keep his editorial pen away from his advocacy role as a curator.

Forsee yesterday also reminded the newly appointed curators that the system's board is independent of the state's Coordinating Board for Higher Education. Lawmakers in January suggested that the state's board needed more authority over universities.

"We need to make sure we do a good job of coordinating ourselves," Forsee said, "or else others will want to help."

Reach Janese Heavin at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jheavin@columbiatribune.com.

MU aims to produce key medical isotope

Reactor in catbird seat as other facilities close.

By T.J. Greaney Sunday, July 26, 2009



Photo by Don Shrubshell

Water in the University of Missouri Research Reactor core has a blue hue in this 2000 image. The core will be used to create molybdenum-99, parent isotope of technetium-99, a key medical isotope in short supply. MU is making preparations to produce the isotope.

A worldwide shortage of a key medical isotope is going from bad to worse, and physicians and lawmakers are now looking to the University of Missouri Research Reactor as perhaps the best long-term solution.

The radioactive isotope, technetium-99, is used in about 50,000 medical studies daily in the United States. It is a tracer element that can be used to detect tumors in cancer patients and coronary blockages in heart patients.

But in May, the United States' primary supplier of the isotope, the Chalk River reactor in Ontario, Canada, shut down unexpectedly after a serious safety hazard was discovered.

"Basically, it sprung a leak," said Ralph Butler, director of the MU research reactor, the MURR.

The shutdown left four other medical isotope-producing reactors in the world scrambling to keep up with demand. Worse, one of those four reactors, the High Flux Reactor in Petten, Netherlands, is shutting down for four weeks to complete regularly scheduled maintenance. Next year, the Petten plant has scheduled another, longer shutdown.

"That's the scary thing," Butler said. "If the Canadian reactor isn't back up and running and the reactor in the Netherlands is shut down, in 2010 there are going to be critical shortages of the isotope. Like down to meeting only 30 or 40 percent of the world demand."

The isotope has a half-life of 66 hours, meaning a shortage can happen very quickly.

Some doctors say they're already feeling the squeeze. Michael Graham is president of the Society of Nuclear Medicine and a radiologist at the University of Iowa. On a weekly or biweekly basis he orders a "generator" containing technetium-99 for tests on his patients. Last week he received a generator — a 1-foot-high cylindrical device containing the parent isotope of technetium, molybdenum-99 — but he has already been told not to expect another next week.

"Our expectation really is, the following week," beginning Aug. 3, "we won't get a generator either. And at that point we will be completely dead in the water," Graham said. "It means that studies will be in essence postponed until we can get a generator, which is likely to be the first week in September. There's just no alternative. It's going to have significant impact on patient care."

Federal officials are calling for action. U.S. Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., last week introduced the American Medical Isotopes Production Act, which would authorize the Department of Energy to spend \$163 million over the next five years to create a "robust" domestic production capacity of molybdenum-99.

The bill also would end the export of highly enriched uranium from the United States in seven to 10 years in an effort to bolster national security while spurring other countries to use low-enriched uranium for isotope production.

Also last week, U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., introduced a "sense of the Senate" amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act urging the energy secretary to find a way to ease the looming isotope shortage. The amendment was accepted unanimously.

All this attention is good news for the MURR, which is farthest along of any domestic producer and will be eligible for federal funds for production. Butler said the plant should be ready to begin isotope production using a fission-based technology that uses only low-enriched uranium targets in 2012.

"It's pretty sad having to rely on these foreign reactors, all of which are in their 40s, and the Canadian one is 52 years old," Graham said. "It's an incredible state of affairs what has occurred."

Reach T.J. Greaney at 573-815-1719 or e-mail tjgreaney@columbiatribune.com.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

University Hospital emergency room doctors open urgent care clinic

By Nick Omland

July 26, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — As emergency room physicians at University Hospital, Scott Schultz and Jason Zerrer saw people with minor injuries or ailments sitting side by side with people who had been in a car wreck, broken a bone or been stabbed.

"Working there, I saw a lot of people who don't necessarily need to be in the emergency room," Schultz said.

That's part of the reason why the doctors are starting their own clinic, Providence Urgent Care. The clinic, located near Providence Road and Nifong Boulevard, opens on Wednesday.

Urgent care, also called acute care, is one of two general reasons that people go to their doctor. The other is for chronic, more long-term care.

"We're not trying to take people away from their primary care physicians," Schultz said. "If you're comfortable going to your doctor, and they're available, we don't want to change that. But say it's the weekend or at night, and your kid has an ear ache. That's when we can help."

Providence Urgent Care will be one of three urgent care clinics in Columbia and the only one that is privately owned. The other two clinics are University Physicians Urgent Care and Boone Convenient Care.

While Schultz and Zerrer are both still employed by University Hospital, Schultz will be spending all his time at Providence Urgent Care and will only work at the hospital if other doctors are unavailable and he gets called in. Zerrer will continue working full time at University Hospital.

Despite the multiple options for health care in Columbia, the city still has a market for urgent care, said Patrice Pash, senior consultant for National Med Network. National Med Network is a consulting group that helps start up urgent care clinics and was hired by Schultz and Zerrer to aid their venture.

"For the most part, urgent care is not competitive with emergency care or family practices," Pash said.

While primary care and urgent care physicians see patients for some of the same acute care needs, they each have their own unique qualities.

"We encourage establishing yourself with a primary care physician, because then they know you," said Gloria Crull, executive director of Family Health Center. "They know all your previous illnesses and what medications you're on. Therefore they are able to assist you with preventive care. Urgent care is a good model of care for meeting people's convenience needs."

A distinctive feature of the Providence Urgent Care is its online check-in system, which allows patients to make appointments online and only be called when a physician is ready to see them. This allows patients to wait at their homes, instead of at a waiting room, Schultz said.

"The online check-in should make things flow a lot better, especially with parents dealing with their kids," said Alan Wieberg, a registered nurse at Providence Urgent Care.

Prepackaged pharmaceuticals for patients, on-site lab tests and X-rays are other features of the clinic designed to get patients in and out quickly.

"Our goal is to have an average time of less than one hour for our patients," Schultz said.

Providence Urgent Care subleases part of its building to Peak Performance Physical Therapy and Sports Medicine. If Providence Urgent Care determines a patient needs physical therapy, they will prescribe it for them and can then recommend Peak Performance. The patient can go elsewhere if he or she wishes, Schultz explained.

The only financial relationship between the two clinics is the subleasing, Schultz said. Peak Performance's new clinic will open Aug. 3.



Teaching plan gets new look

School district, college knot deal.

By Janese Heavin Saturday, July 25, 2009

Columbia College and Columbia Public Schools have formed a new partnership that aims to benefit students pursuing education careers and teachers wanting to further their studies.

School district Superintendent Chris Belcher and college President Gerald Brouder signed the partnership agreement Thursday.

Under that contract, Columbia College students will be allowed to student-teach at Benton, Grant, Midway Heights and Russell Boulevard elementary schools, Gentry and Smithton middle schools and West Junior High School. Qualifying students also would be allowed to substitute in those partner schools. District staff would then assess the performance of those student teachers.

In exchange, Columbia College has agreed to waive tuition for one graduate course for qualifying school district faculty.

In the past, the University of Missouri helped place Columbia College education students in schools, said Terry Smith, Columbia College dean for academic affairs. That arrangement was "too difficult" for everybody, he said.

By working directly with the school district, Columbia College students will have more predictable placements and will be able to form relationships with staff at their assigned schools.

"What this does is enriches" the experience "by allowing these students to have a predictable group of people with whom they'll work," Smith said. "They will know well in advance where they're going to be and with whom they're going to be working."

The student teachers also will help those schools establish after-school programs for the elementary and middle school students.

On the flip side, Smith said Columbia College has a strong graduate education program, "and we'd love to have the Columbia Public Schools teachers in it."

Through the arrangement, a school principal would be able to grant a teacher the tuition waiver to either start graduate-level studies or take a specific course.

The partnership is a way to further take advantage of local higher-education opportunities, Belcher said in a prepared statement.

“Columbia College is one of the leading experts in the nation in online course development, and our teachers will take advantage of that,” he said. “Or, if our teachers want to take in-seat classes, they can almost literally step out their back door. It’s convenient.”

The two entities plan to meet twice a year to review the arrangement and will produce an annual report on the partnership.

Reach Janese Heavin at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jheavin@columbiatribune.com.

This article was published on page A12 of the Saturday, July 25, 2009 edition of The Columbia Daily Tribune.