

Biosafety Research Communication Network

Project Web Sites: <http://www.gmo-safety.eu/>
http://www.gmo-safety.eu/en/biosafenet_navigator/562.docu.html

Executive Summary

Biosafenet is a network of European scientists working in the field of GMO biosafety research. The project aims to combine the information on biosafety from various EU research programmes and from existing European GMO biosafety networks. Additionally, research results are summarised for scientific discussion as well as for policy making and public. Biosafety research – its results and activities – is presented in a clearer way to increase visibility and acceptance. In the frame of the project BIOSAFENET aims to:

- strengthen the role of European scientists by supporting their participation in international symposia on biosafety and co-operation with the International Society for Biosafety Research,
- establish an international network of local biosafety research representatives and promote involvement in GMO biosafety research and support the implementation of biosafety considerations, especially in the new Member States and associated candidate countries,
- establish a series of seminars and recommendation reports thus helping to develop the common knowledge base necessary for a coherent development of policies,
- provide a public and scientific database and web sites on biosafety related information and biosafety research projects with a “one stop shop” for biosafety issues,
- make the existing information more easily accessible and comprehensible for both a broader public and the various stakeholders involved.

The Project has four work packages:

WP 1 - Support and enhance the role of European scientists in the area of GMO biosafety research

WP 2 - Improve networking of European biosafety research, strengthen the role of European researchers

WP 3 - Establish the BIOSAFENET internet-platform

WP 4 - Media relations, increasing awareness of BIOSAFENET-web site, marketing and content co-operations

The project officially started in September 2006 and initial funding was received in November 2006.

WP 1

A delegation of 18 European Scientists was invited by BIOSAFENET to actively participate in the *10th International Symposium on the Biosafety of Genetically Modified Organism* in Wellington, New Zealand in November 2008. A summary report will be published in *Environmental Biosafety Research*. Two expert seminars on biosafety issues were held in reporting period 2 (i.e. 2nd year). The first BIOSAFENET seminar, organised in co-operation with Mike Wilkinson (University of Aberystwyth, UK), was held at ICGEB in Ca'Tron, Italy, in January 2008. It was entitled "Beyond fitness: how do we predict the consequences of enhanced fitness following gene flow from GM crops". There were 19 participants from the following countries: Germany, Hungary, Italy, UK, and USA. As an outcome of the seminar, a Meeting Report and a Recommendation Report were drafted, and the latter will be published in *Environmental Biosafety Research*. The second BIOSAFENET seminar reviewed the "Experience from monitoring the commercial cultivation of *Bt* maize in Europe - conclusions and recommendations for future monitoring practice" and was scheduled from 23 to 25 April 2008. It was co-organised with a workshop on GMO-Monitoring by JKI in Berlin, Germany. 14 experts from Belgium, Germany, Spain, Switzerland and the UK attended. A Meeting Report and a Recommendation Report were prepared, and the latter will be published in *Environmental Biosafety Research*. Three more seminars are scheduled for 2009 dealing with statistics for field trials, genetically modified insects, and stress resistant crops.

WP 2

All BIOSAFENET contractors are connected with or participate in other EU-funded projects that are related to biosafety issues. Further information on biosafety research activity in the Central and East European countries were collected by a questionnaire, which was distributed among regional scientists and experts in several meetings. An internal list of biosafety experts and institutions is continuously updated (currently 81 experts). Several seminars were organised with focus on the regional networking of biosafety experts by the Pannonian Plant Biotechnology Association PPBA and the Black Sea Biotechnology Association. A series of seminars arranged by NHRF provided insight into the following topics: “*Biosafety. Scientific background*”, “*Green Biotechnology and Biosafety*”, “*Social and Perception issues*”, “*Principles of Risk Assessment, Risk Management and Risk Communication*”, and the “*Political Context and Regulation*”. BIOSAFENET supported the International Society for Biosafety Research by designing and editing a Newsletter. The BiosafeRes (formerly GMO RES COM) database has been operational on the ICGEB biosafety webpage (<http://www.icgeb.org/~gmores/prod/index.php>) since October 2007 (D-25). The database has undergone a complete structural and programming overhaul, followed by both alpha- and beta-phase testing, i.e. in house testing to identify initial operational difficulties requiring further programming to resolve, as well as external testing by a selected number of possible Project Managers, (primarily those new contacts from the Balkan region, in addition to ISBR members) to insert new/fresh data. Some small problems have been further identified and are in the process of being resolved. Much needed now are efforts to make the database more widely known, in order to bring the content up-to-date and be of greatest use. In 2008, two meetings with other EU-funded projects were organised. The first dealt with an introduction of the institutions and the identification of a common scientific issue that will be dealt with in further meetings: risk assessment strategies. The second meeting was linked to a conjoint presentation of the projects BIOSAFENET, Science4BioReg, Co-Extra, TransContainer and PharmaPlanta in the Conference/Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol introducing European biosafety research and risk assessment to the international audience.

WP 3

The BIOSAFENET internet platform, the central communication tool of the project to disseminate biosafety-related information to the public and relevant stakeholders, has been successfully established in October 2006 (<http://www.gmo-safety.eu/>). It now offers a broad range of information on biosafety issues in public debate, and scientific results are transferred to a broader audience through a series of interviews, focus articles (media sets) and news articles. The site maintains three databases, on co-existence, online biosafety documents and biosafety internet web resources, which help users to find appropriate information (http://www.gmo-safety.eu/en/biosafenet_navigator/562.docu.html). It currently receives up to 37,000 visitors per month.

WP 4

Media-relations activities have contributed to a broad dissemination of biosafety-related information to public and stakeholders. A list of about 900 international journalists was compiled. This distribution list is used to inform journalists about BIOSAFENET-related products. In the course of the project, more than 20 requests of journalists/institutions for further information or interview partners were registered. In addition, the number of newsletter subscribers increased from 1200 to 2950. The newsletter is sent approximately monthly. 16 information packages (media sets), which address important topics of the public debate have been published. A survey was initiated to retain feedback on the user acceptance of the BIOSAFENET web site. Most respondents (about 87 %) rated the quality of articles as good or very good. Some respondents suggested new topics for articles and interviews (e.g. developing countries, risk/benefit analysis, organic farming).

Deviations from planning

Further seminars and meetings with EU-funded projects have been planned. It turned out that appropriate dates, where experts are jointly available, were cumulating in 2009. Therefore, BIOSAFENET applied for a no-cost prolongation of the project until June 2009 to finalise activities within the project period.