

Synthetic biology raising international concerns - US Commission to neglect risks of artificial organisms

Munich/ Washington D.C. 16 December 2010. The US Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues today released its recommendations on the oversight of synthetic biology, provoking strong criticism from 58 organizations in 22 countries for its failure to respond to key environmental and public health risks.

In a joint letter also signed by Testbiotech, these various organizations reject the recommendations as a flawed response to advances in synthetic biology, including the creation this year of the first entirely synthetic organism. In particular, they criticize the recommendations because they ignore the precautionary principle, lack an adequate review of environmental risks, place unwarranted faith in “suicide genes” and other technologies which provide no guarantee that synthetic organisms will not escape into the environment, and their reliance on “self regulation” in industry which is equivalent to having no independent oversight at all.

“There are too many open questions and uncertainties around the creation and usage of artificial life forms. What is needed is international regulation to protect biodiversity from intended and unintended releases. Further, the activities of companies active in gene synthesis need to be controlled by independent institutions,” says Christoph Then at Testbiotech.

The joint letter calls for a moratorium on the release and commercial use of synthetic organisms until serious studies on the full environmental, health and socio-economic impacts of this emerging technology have been carried out.

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Further information: [The letter to the Presidential Commission from civil society groups can be viewed at:](#) [2]

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[1] <mailto:info@testbiotech.org>

[2] http://www.foe.org/sites/default/files/Letter_to_Commission_Synthetic_Biology.pdf