

OIA23-0057

24 February 2023

Tangata Whenua
fyi-request-21431-950f030b@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Tangata Whenua

Thank you for your email of 7 February 2023 requesting information relating to the National Biocontainment Laboratory. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

You requested the following

What safety measures will be put in place to protect the public in the unfortunate event that a virus escapes from the bio lab in Wallaceville?

The National Biocontainment Laboratory (NBL) in Wallaceville was designed and built to meet international standards required for laboratories of its type and is approved as meeting the international standards required in New Zealand. The facility is monitored 24/7 and serviced on a regular basis to ensure its containment systems operate as intended. Further information regarding the lab can be found here: <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/science/laboratories/national-animal-health-laboratory/national-biocontainment-laboratory/>.

In addition to the physical facility, our procedures are accredited to international quality assurance standards ISO:17025. We have regular internal and external audit programmes, training programmes and risk management systems in place. This ensures our staff are highly trained and experienced in laboratory operations including the emergency response.

Since the Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI) began operating a high-level biocontainment facility at Wallaceville in 1999, there has not been an accidental release from containment.

In the unlikely event of an accidental release of infectious organisms MPI would utilise our emergency animal disease investigation and containment methods. These are used constantly to respond to suspected and confirmed cases of foreign animal and plant disease. You can read more about this on our website here: <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/biosecurity/how-to-find-report-and-prevent-pests-and-diseases/surveillance-programmes/>

I trust the information provided is of assistance. Should you have any concerns with this response, I would encourage you to raise these with the Ministry for Primary Industries at Official.InformationAct@mpi.govt.nz.

Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143 or at info@ombudsman.parliament.nz.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V Herrera', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Veronica Herrera
Director, Diagnostic & Surveillance Services