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Regarding: Update on Radiation safety and Open Agriculture activities for the MIT Bates Research and Engineering Center

To members of the Bates community,

I write to share with you updates on two issues that have been in review related to activities at Bates.

Radiation Safety Practices at Bates affirmed

This past fall, the Massachusetts Radiation Control Program (MRCP) conducted inspections at the Bates facility in response to allegations that MIT mishandled radioactive material. MIT takes such allegations very seriously, and we worked diligently with regulators as they conducted inspections and completed their reports, in which the agency concluded that there were no issues of non-compliance.

The steps taken

According to our conversations with the inspection team from the MRCP, an individual alleged that MIT failed to adequately secure radioactive material at the Bates facility, potentially exposing employees and visitors to radioactive contaminated equipment. A second allegation was reported to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, whereby a concerned individual stated that “at MIT Bates in Middleton there was a leak of radiation as to which MIT could not identify the source and that student’s dosimeters were maxed out.” The concerned individual requested to remain anonymous.

The MRCP conducted inspections on October 22, 2019 and November 14, 2019. In addition, a special unannounced security inspection was undertaken by the MRCP accompanied by the concerned individual on November 19, 2019. The inspections consisted of field observations, interviews with personnel, and an examination of records. Records were reviewed from 1995 to present, inclusive of all radioactive waste management activities, radiation worker exposure dosimetry records, radioactive source inventory, and training for all persons who work at or visit the campus.

The outcome

The MRCP issued its final reports on November 7, 2019 and December 3, 2019, respectively, indicating that there were “no items of noncompliance found as a result of this inspection” related to radiation safety or agency regulations. At no time were any employees or visitors exposed to harmful materials.



The Bates campus has had an exemplary record with respect to radiation worker safety and compliance with federal/state regulations. During the past two decades, there have been four federal inspections and sixteen state inspections of MIT's use of radiation sources at the Bates campus. Each of these inspections resulted in no items of noncompliance. Additional details about this investigation of the Bates Research and Engineering Center and MIT's Radiation Protection Program are available [here](#).

Open Agriculture Activities

I also want to update you regarding questions that have been raised about research conducted by the Open Agriculture Initiative (OpenAg), an MIT Media Lab group that previously conducted research at Bates, and the manner in which the group handled spent growing solution. These concerns prompted a review of the OpenAg site at Bates by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP). On September 18, 2019, MIT's Vice President for Research, Prof. Maria T. Zuber, halted OpenAg activities, pending completion of all ongoing assessments. Those activities remained halted as of April 30, when the OpenAg Initiative at the MIT Media Lab closed permanently.

On April 22, MassDEP concluded their review of OpenAg activities at Bates and fined MIT for discharging spent plant growing solution and dilute cleaning fluids into an Underground Injection Control (UIC) well in violation of the conditions of the well registration terms.

In addition to paying the fine, the Institute will close the well and, with the end of OpenAg research activity at Bates, has ceased discharge of any plant nutrient and cleaning solution to the Bates grounds or to the well. MIT will submit a plan for the closure of the well to MassDEP for their review and approval. More information related to this can be found on the Bates site [here](#).

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who supported the recent inspections by MRCP and MassDEP. The safety of our community and visitors is paramount to everything we do, and we deeply appreciate those who make this their priority every day. MIT takes seriously its commitments to ensuring that research conducted at Bates and other facilities adheres to environmental health and safety regulations and protocols, and we are committed to working constructively with these agencies and the Town of Middleton.

If you have any questions related to these matters, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Boleslaw Wyslouch