



Clarification on Service Animals in Laboratories: Compliance with Federal Laws and BMBL Guidance

Dear Colleagues,

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Office of Laboratory Safety (OLS) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Division of Occupational Health and Safety (DOHS) are taking an opportunity to clarify guidance regarding service animals contained in the 6th edition of [Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories](#) (BMBL).

Since its initial publication in 1984, the BMBL has functioned as an advisory document, emphasizing containment and protocol-driven risk assessment as foundational principles for promoting safety in biomedical and microbiological laboratories. The development of the sixth edition BMBL reflects the collaborative efforts of over 200 scientific and professional colleagues, who contributed as technical working group members, reviewers, guest editors, and subject matter experts. While the BMBL offers a framework for guiding entities in the development of policies for safe laboratory operations, it is not a regulatory document and does not address all potential scenarios, such as the presence of service animals in laboratory spaces.

The sixth edition BMBL states that “Animals and plants not associated with the work being performed are not permitted in the laboratory,” reflecting a widely accepted best practice in laboratory settings. However, this provision must not be construed as superseding applicable laws regarding service animals. When entities conduct risk assessments and establish policies that accommodate service animals, such practices should comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations. Importantly, the BMBL lacks the authority to mandate changes to institutional practices or policies and should not be used as a basis to deny reasonable accommodations or service requests. Institutions implementing BMBL recommendations must do so in compliance with all laws.

It is important to note that recommendations provided in the BMBL should never replace an entity's own risk assessment. CDC and NIH encourage entities to use the BMBL as a tool for conducting their own risk assessment when developing policies for their laboratories.

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