

USAMRIID CAN'T KEEP TRACK OF ITS MICROBES

Now, what do you make of the fact that USAMRIID, the lab at which Bruce Ivins was alleged to have made the anthrax used in the 2001 attacks, is having problems cataloging and tracking their high-risk microbes and biomaterials (h/t Danger Room)?

The U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) has suspended research activities involving biological select agents and toxins. Army officials took the step on Friday after discovering apparent problems with the system of accounting for high-risk microbes and biomaterials at the Fort Detrick, Maryland, facility.

The lab has been under intense scrutiny since August, when the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) named former USAMRIID researcher Bruce Ivins as the perpetrator of the 2001 anthrax letter attacks. Although the case never went to trial because of Ivins's suicide on 29 July 2008, FBI officials have claimed that the evidence against him is indisputable and that he carried out the mailings using anthrax stolen from a flask at USAMRIID.

Officials have begun a complete inventory of all select agents and toxins at the facility. All experiments using select agents will remain suspended until the accounting is finished, which could take several weeks. Several USAMRIID researchers have been grumbling about the decision, which seems to have caught them by surprise, according to a government official not connected to the lab.

The decision was announced by institute

commander Col. John Skvorak in a 4 February memo to employees. The memo, which *ScienceInsider* has obtained, says the standard of accountability that USAMRIID had been applying to its select agents and toxins was not in line with the standard required by the Army and the Department of Defense. [my empahsis]

One key to the FBI case against Ivins, after all, is that he had complete control over the sole flask that contained the strain of anthrax used in the attack. But now we come to find out that, more than six months after his death, they still don't have a sound inventory of what they have where?

I'd say that FBI case is looking weaker and weaker.