ICCVAM engages interest groups at public meeting

By Catherine Sprankle

Members of the Interagency Coordinating Committee on the Validation of Alternative Methods (ICCVAM) *(http://ntp.niehs.nih.gov/pubhealth/evalatm/iccvam/index.html)* met with representatives of industry, academia, and animal welfare organizations, to discuss alternatives for chemical and product safety testing.

The June 25 public forum was held at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland.

Updates from member agencies

ICCVAM co-chair Anna Lowit, Ph.D., from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), summarized ICCVAM activities since the September 2013 meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Alternative Toxicological Methods. *(http://ntp.niehs.nih.gov/about/org/sacatm/index.html)* She also provided updates on ICCVAM scientific focus areas, plans for improved stakeholder communication, and new paradigms for test method validation.

Joanna Matheson, Ph.D., of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, detailed activities in one of ICCVAM's priority areas - skin sensitization. "Because the adverse outcome pathway for skin sensitization is well-characterized, and a number of nonanimal test methods have been developed, it has great promise for the near-term development of testing strategies that do not require the use of animals," she noted. To reach this goal, ICCVAM is actively collaborating with its European counterparts and industry, to identify an optimal strategy.

Agencies highlight ongoing activities

After a summary of National Toxicology Program (NTP) Interagency Center for the Evaluation of Alternative Toxicological Methods (NICEATM) activities, by director Warren Casey, Ph.D., other ICCVAM member agencies highlighted their activities relevant to replacing, reducing, or refining animal use.

Lowit; her fellow co-chair Abigail Jacobs, Ph.D., of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration; and ICCVAM members Raymond Tice, Ph.D., from NIEHS; Barnett Rattner, Ph.D., from the U.S. Department of the Interior; and Christine Kelley, Ph.D., of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) gave updates on a wide spectrum of activities. These ranged from near-term solutions, such as product-specific validation of nonanimal methods, to longer-term, more complex approaches, such as organs-on-a-chip, to predict human health hazards and minimize animal use.

Key points raised in response to the agency updates, and during the open comment period included requests for increased transparency in reporting animal use by industry, and the need for adequate training on nonanimal test methods for reviewers at ICCVAM regulatory agencies (see side bar).

Casey closed the meeting by noting that ICCVAM plans to hold similar events annually. "We want to ensure that our stakeholders have ample opportunity to interact in person with ICCVAM, by having these types of open dialogue," he said, encouraging all participants to provide feedback on how the meetings could be improved.

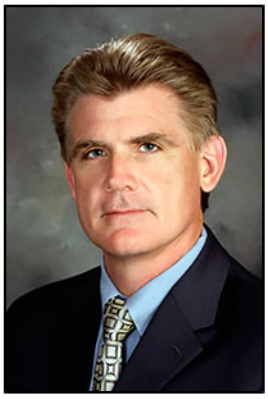
NICEATM, which supports ICCVAM, organized the forum.

(Catherine Sprankle is a communications specialist with ILS Inc., support contractor for NICEATM.)

Casey discusses nonanimal testing approaches with regulators

A key point raised by public forum participants - training regulatory agency reviewers on the applicability and availability of nonanimal test methods and strategies - was precisely the topic Casey discussed with EPA personnel in a June 24 webinar titled "Validation and Utilization of Alternative Test Methods."

Casey presented an overview of internationally accepted nonanimal methods for identifying substances that can cause skin or eye irritation. He discussed current efforts to develop strategies that use data from multiple sources to arrive at a hazard classification for potential skin sensitizers - an approach that may soon enable elimination of animal testing for this purpose.



In his presentation at the forum, Casey highlighted NICEATM's ongoing projects, including efforts associated with endocrine disruptor screening methods, aquatic models of toxicity testing, extrapolation of in vitro data to in vivo effects, and adverse outcome pathways. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

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