

Microbe labs proposed for California

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The University of California and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory are pushing for approval of two California research centers to study virulent diseases.

Opponents of the laboratories say research centers that study fatal diseases should not be located near a high population center like San Francisco.

The Livermore lab would be a "Biosafety Level Three" lab, authorized to study plague, botulism, anthrax and Q fever, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

Stephan Volker, an Oakland attorney representing Tri-Valley CARES of Livermore, warned that an earthquake could "unleash billions of deadly pathogens, for which there is no known cure."

A second research center near Tracy could be ranked "Biosafety Level Four," meaning it might analyze the world's most deadly pathogens. Though it would focus on natural or terrorist-caused agricultural diseases, the lab would be authorized to work on Ebola -- which could not be studied at Livermore's Level Three lab.

Lawrence B. Coleman, a physicist and University of California vice provost for research, dismissed concerns, saying, "We have the technology to make (the research) extremely safe."

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