

Safety of proposed microbe lab questioned

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A federal judge in San Francisco says she finds it troubling that Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory plans to build a biodefense lab in the Bay Area.

The proposed laboratory in Livermore, Calif., would be used to store and experiment with trillions of deadly microbes, The San Francisco Chronicle reported.

Ninth U.S. Circuit Court Chief Judge Mary Schroeder told a Tuesday hearing a government environmental report on the project doesn't include "any discussion anywhere of what seems most troublesome," namely the proposed biodefense lab "is being built in a very highly populated area of Northern California."

While an attorney representing the U.S. Department of Energy facility told the appellate panel the lab would be safe, opposing lawyers disagreed, saying an accident -- perhaps caused by an earthquake -- might eject deadly microbes that winds could blow as far as San Francisco or points beyond, the Chronicle reported.

The laboratory's opponents are asking for a more thorough environmental assessment or a complete environmental impact statement.

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