

# LST builds first global nanotech regulation database

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A global database of government documents on nanotechnology is being launched by three law professors at Arizona State University who, with their colleagues in Australia and Belgium, have corralled and organized a massive number of regulatory documents dealing with the rapidly advancing technology.

The Nanotech Regulatory Document Archive, ([nanotech.law.asu.edu](http://nanotech.law.asu.edu)), is a free resource built and maintained by the Center for the Study of Law, Science, & Technology at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law. Over the past year, Gary Marchant, the center's executive director, and center Faculty Fellows Douglas Sylvester and Kenneth Abbott, developed the database as part of a multiyear grant from the U.S. Department of Energy's Genomic Science Program.

The project is a natural fit for the center, which is housed in the first U.S. law school to offer a regular course in [nanotechnology](#), has several faculty members who actively publish in the area and has amassed a cluster of law student researchers in the emerging technology, Marchant said.

The archive will enable government regulators, industry officials, public-interest groups, educators, students and the public to search for a variety of documents from every country in the world, and from every level of government. Its creation comes at a time when the worldwide regulation of nanotechnology is expected to ramp up considerably, in an attempt to keep pace with the science, Marchant said.

"There's going to be a lot of activity in this area, and it's very important for people to be able to keep up," he said. "Every country is in the same place, going through the same steps, starting to put into place regulatory programs. We need to promote harmonization among these countries, and one way to do that is to have access in other jurisdictions, and to see what other people are doing."

Sylvester expects the Web site will become an essential resource for the latest news on nanotechnology regulation and a great tool for researching and comparing regulatory approaches around the world.

"As the pace and scope of nano regulation grows, the need for international collaboration in projects like these also will grow," he said.

The value of the database extends even beyond nanotechnology, Abbott added. "Biotechnology, cognitive science and other technologies are developing just as rapidly, and will have equally significant social impacts," he said. "We need to learn how countries can and do respond to innovations like these."

The center was assisted by the Centre of Regulatory Studies at Monash University Law School in Australia and the Institute of Environmental and Energy Law at K.U. Leuven in Belgium. Diana Bowman, a senior research fellow in the Monash Centre, said the archive is a much-needed resource that will become a hub for those interested in exploring the evolving debates and understanding nanotechnology policy and regulatory developments.

"While scientists and industry have been increasingly focused on manipulating matter at the nanoscale in order to produce increasingly sophisticated and novel applications, governments, academics, civil society and other key stakeholders have dedicated significant time and resources to considering the broad implications of the technology,"

Bowman said. "The speed of these debates has moved swiftly, resulting in an overwhelming volume of literature. And this is only the beginning."

Geert Van Calster, co-director of K.U. Leuven's Institute, pointed out the paradox in the nanotechnology regulatory debate, in that there are few regulations on the books, yet a plethora of analysis, opinions, government resolutions and other information exist.

"This archive will allow the user quickly to find the trees of the debate, and subsequently to dig for the sources that will give you the forest for the trees - a tour de force, and one that is very timely," Van Calster said.

In the database, each entry provides a direct link and/or an attached copy of a specific document, an abstract of that document prepared for the database, and a listing of other pertinent information including author, date and document type. Documents for a specific jurisdiction can be accessed by clicking on a map or on a region, nation or entity.

"The Web site is intended to operate as an edited wiki, and we urge users from around the globe to edit, add, delete and comment on the Web site," Sylvester said. "It's a great tool, but it will require users to keep it up-to-date."

Provided by Arizona State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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