

CITY OF SHORELINE
SHORELINE CITY COUNCIL
SUMMARY MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING

TOUR OF WASHINGTON PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORY (PHL)

Friday, May 16, 2008 - 3:00 p.m.
Public Health Laboratory
1610 NE 150th Street

PRESENT: Deputy Mayor Scott, and Councilmembers Eggen, McConnell, and Way

ABSENT: Mayor Ryu and Councilmembers Hansen and McGlashan

STAFF: Julie Underwood, Assistant City Manager

PHL STAFF: State Representative Maralyn Chase; Mary Selecky, Washington State Secretary of Health; Dr. Romesh Gautom, Director; Lain Knowles, Assistant Director; et. al.

Deputy Mayor Scott convened the meeting at 3:15 p.m. with opening remarks and introductions around the room. Secretary Selecky welcomed everyone and provided a brief history of the Department of Health.

The tour started in the Office of Environmental Laboratory Sciences, where the emphasis is on water chemistry/biology, shellfish, food parasites, blood lead, and radiation chemistry. It was also pointed out that larger organizations within the State often have their own laboratories; however, if there is a state epidemiology issue, then the PHL gets involved and does the analysis.

The tour group entered the radiation chemistry area, noting that the instruments can identify almost any radiological element and can determine whether the radiation is man-made or naturally occurring. The department processes 1,500-2,000 samples annually and conducts about 12 tests for each sample.

The work conducted in the shellfish department includes for "red tide" toxin and domoic acid toxin.

As the group made its way to the food/microbiology department, Mr. Gautom identified the area of the facility that will see a future expansion. It was noted that the Department of Health owns the land on which the PHL is located (ownership was transferred from DSHS to DOH). They related that the property is five acres and the intent is to expand the facility from its current 70,000 share feet to 80,000 square feet. It was noted that the new space created by the expansion will be equally divided between laboratory and specimen reception.

Mr. Knowles briefly explained security protocols and noted that employee background checks are done through the Department of Health.

The group was then directed to the food/microbiology department, where they were given a tour of the facilities and instruments involved in testing for tuberculosis, whooping cough, food poisoning, food-borne illness, etc.

Dr. Gautom noted that PHL staff makes positive determinations 99.9% of the time. The PHL serves as a link and works collaboratively with state, local, and federal entities in order to corroborate each others' findings.

For testing for organisms that cause various conditions, such as whooping cough, the PHL works very closely with state epidemiologists to know what they should be testing for.

Everyone toured the communicable disease facility where 20,000-30,000 specimens are analyzed annually. The tour also included the testing area for measles, mumps, rubella, rabies, West Nile, etc.

As the tour continued, it was noted that the air pressure and filtration system within the facility is designed to ensure that contaminants are captured. PHL staff also explained the backup/emergency power system, and clarified that the PHL was built in 1985 specifically as a laboratory.

The tour went through the Newborn Screening area and Dr. Guatom noted that state law requires screening of every newborn in Washington State; the PHL processes screenings for approximately 83,000 births annually. There were questions and comments regarding the handling and processing of samples and the treatments for various disorders. Analysis of the specimens is fully automated, and staff currently screens for 10 congenital disorders.

The tour ended in the laboratory training room, where classes for nurses and laboratory technicians are provided. Dr. Gautom stated that the PHL has an extensive training program and works closely with local high schools, colleges, medical schools; and universities. Students come to the PHL for training as part of their laboratory curriculum.

The meeting concluded at 5:20 p.m.

Julie Underwood, Assistant City Manager