

May 26, 2026

The Honorable T. March Bell
Inspector General
Department of Health and Human Services
330 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Inspector General Bell:

Rocky Mountain Laboratories (RML) is a federal National Institutes of Health (NIH) research facility in Hamilton, Montana, that conducts studies on some of the world's most dangerous infectious diseases. The seriousness of the work conducted at RML means that even small lapses can carry real risks for the staff and surrounding community. Recently, a whistleblower complaint became public alleging misconduct involving RML employees that may pose a threat to our national security.¹ Additionally, according to NIH's reporting, there have been two incidents involving the "theft, loss, or release of a pathogen" in the last year.^{2,3} Given the role of the Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General in providing independent oversight of the NIH, I urge a formal investigation into the safety, security, and personnel practices at RML.

In November 2025, a RML employee's personal protective equipment was breached by a bite, and the employee was exposed to Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever (CCHF)⁴, which is a severe, tick-borne viral disease that can lead to life-threatening hemorrhages and carries a fatality rate of up to 40 percent. This biosafety incident required the exposed employee to quarantine at a specialized medical facility to monitor symptoms and prevent disease transmission. Additionally, in February 2026, a RML employee was potentially exposed to CCHF while handling laboratory mice due to a hole in their personal protective equipment.⁵

Even more concerning are recent reports regarding Dr. Vincent Munster, a foreign-educated virologist who is a senior scientist at RML and has a history of studying and experimenting with coronaviruses, monkeypox, Ebola, and other potentially dangerous pathogens. The whistleblower complaint alleges that in January 2026, Dr. Munster and his associate – both foreign-educated scientists – traveled to Africa to perform research activities. Upon their return

¹ McCarney, Meg, "WCW Exposes Accident with Deadly Virus at NIH Animal Lab," *White Coat Waste*, May 12, 2026, <https://www.whitecoatwaste.org/blog/2026/05/12/wcw-exposes-accident-with-deadly-virus-at-nih-animal-lab/>

² National Institutes of Health, "NIH Institutional Biosafety Committee Meeting Minutes, Rocky Mountain Laboratories, June 18, 2025," National Institutes of Health, Hamilton, MT, June 18, 2025.

³ National Institutes of Health, "NIH Institutional Biosafety Committee Meeting Minutes, Rocky Mountain Laboratories, February 19, 2026," National Institutes of Health, February 19, 2026.

⁴ Abell, Jessica, "Hamilton Lab Employee Exposed to Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever," *Ravalli Republic*, February 17, 2026, https://ravallirepublic.com/news/local/business/article_d321618d-0562-42bb-8879-c8d49a58f89b.html.

⁵ Abell, Jessica, "NIH Confirms 2 Pathogen Exposure Incidents at Hamilton's Rocky Mountain Labs," *Billings Gazette*, May 21, 2026, https://billingsgazette.com/news/local/government-politics/article_537b4db8-48b8-5ac5-834d-c7df222e7f00.html

to the United States on January 25, 2026, Munster was detained at the Detroit International Airport after allegedly transporting vials with unknown contents in his personal luggage. It has since been confirmed that Dr. Munster was indeed detained at the airport and there is an ongoing investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

The whistleblower then alleges that on January 26, 2026, RML permitted Dr. Munster and his associates to “come and go as they pleased into the facility, into the high containment BSL-4 building, and into their offices.” Despite being detained the day before, the whistleblower alleges this occurred “completely unsupervised and unrestricted.” According to the whistleblower, on January 27, 2026, RML then restricted access to the three individuals, though a “personal representative” was allowed to get their belongings. Another concern, if true, is the claim that one of Munster’s associates has since had full facility access restored.

These events raise serious questions about the safety and security procedures at RML, including NIH’s hiring and personnel management practices for scientists handling dangerous pathogens. It is critical that scientists, especially those with foreign connections, are thoroughly vetted given the potentially catastrophic impacts of their work on our nation’s health and security.

Therefore, I request that your office review:

- The November 2025 and February 2026 incidents at RML, including the details of each event, the purpose of the research and the pathogens being used, and the biosafety and biosecurity procedures followed by the lab.
- The adequacy of RML’s safety, security, and oversight policies, and any recommendations to strengthen policies to prevent future laboratory incidents.
- RML’s personnel management practices, including background checks, oversight, and clearance processes for staff who handle high-risk pathogens or have access to sensitive materials and the facility, and any recommendations to ensure that employees placed in a position of public trust are appropriately vetted and monitored.
- NIH’s protocols for employees under investigation, including facility access, employment status, and coordination with law enforcement, and any recommendations to ensure these protocols protect against potential security risks.

In light of the seriousness of these incidents and the risks posed by potentially rogue scientists, I urge your immediate attention to this matter. The Hamilton community and our nation deserve assurances that Rocky Mountain Laboratories is operating under thorough oversight, that proper safety and security protocols are being followed, and that personnel handling hazardous biological materials are being properly vetted and supervised. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Tim Sheehy
United States Senator