

## Artificial life 'could be created within five years'

Artificial life could be created "within five years", researchers from the USA have claimed.

Last Updated: 3:17PM GMT 13 Mar 2009

Laboratories across the world are closing in on a "second genesis" - an achievement that would be one of the greatest scientific breakthroughs of all time.

Prof David Deamer, from California University, said although building a new lifeform from scratch is a daunting task he is confident it can happen in five to 10 years.



Prof David Deamer believes building a new lifeform from scratch is a daunting task but is confident it could happen in five to 10 years Photo: GETTY

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He said: "The momentum is building - we're knocking at the door."

A synthetic, made-to-order living system could produce everything from new drugs to biofuels and greenhouse gas absorbers.

Opponents of the controversial research claim the technology could lead to machines becoming "almost human".

But there would be no safety issues for a long time as any initial organisms would be very primitive and need large-scale life support in the lab, reports New Scientist.

The finishing line could be in sight after geneticists Professor George Church and Dr Michael Jewett, of Harvard

Medical School, told a synthetic biology conference in Hong Kong that they had synthetically created part of a cell, called a ribosome.

The breakthrough offers hope that they could create an entire cell; something Prof Church believes would be a relatively minor challenge.

He said: "There's nothing you'd expect to go wrong - the way we expected things to go wrong with the assembly."

However, according to Dr Anthony Forster, of Vanderbilt University, Tennessee, who is also creating a synthetic living cell in a test tube with Prof Church, "until you actually try this you won't know".

"Having said that we know cells can do it so we should be able to do it sooner or later."