

Emergency Ventilation Shut-Off Controls

What is an
emergency
ventilation shut-off
control?

Emergency ventilation shut-off controls shut down the ventilation system and chemical fume hoods in a laboratory. They are very similar in appearance to a fire alarm, although they are labeled “Emergency Ventilation Shut Off.” They are always located in the hallway adjacent to the entrance door of the laboratory. These controls have recently been installed in some new and renovated laboratories as a result of building and fire code requirements.

What happens
when emergency
ventilation shut-
off controls are
activated?

When these controls are activated, ventilation in that laboratory is shut down, including the laboratory’s chemical fume hoods. This may result in the spread of chemical vapors from the fume hood into the laboratory. Because chemical fume hoods help maintain laboratories at negative air pressure with respect to the hallway, shutting down the fume hoods may cause smoke and gases from the laboratory to spread into the hallway. Despite the name, **using emergency ventilation shut-off controls during an emergency is usually inappropriate because of the resulting hazard to laboratory and building occupants.**

When should
emergency
ventilation shut-off
controls be used?

During most foreseeable laboratory emergencies, emergency ventilation shut-off controls should not be used because of the increased hazard to building occupants and emergency responders. Despite looking like a fire alarm, emergency ventilation shut-off controls are meant to be used only by fire fighters and trained emergency responders. **Building occupants should not use these controls in a spill or fire situation unless instructed to do so by emergency response personnel.** In case of fire, pull the fire alarm (**not** the emergency ventilation shut-off), get to a safe location, and call 911. In case of chemical spill or release, evacuate the affected area and contact the Building Coordinator, department contact, or EH&S at 642 3073. To summon assistance after hours or for large incidents, call 911. Building occupants should not pull the emergency ventilation shut-off controls.

If you have any questions about the use of emergency ventilation shut-off controls, call the Office of Environment, Health & Safety at 642-3073.

