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EH&S FACT SHEET
Environment, Health and Safety Information for the Berkeley Campus

Clutter as a Laboratory Safety Concern

Campus laboratories that are cluttered and poorly organized present a variety of safety hazards to researchers, students, and visitors. In some cases, campus laboratories have been cited by government regulators for excessive clutter and related hazards.

This Fact Sheet describes UC Berkeley's requirements for controlling clutter in campus laboratories. These requirements are based on regulations, campus policies, consensus "best practices," and input from researchers and laboratory safety professionals.

To maintain a safe and well organized laboratory, it is important to properly dispose of chemicals and equipment that are no longer needed, and not to buy in bulk unless there is space available to safely store the material. Also, it can be useful to schedule "lab clean up days" periodically throughout each academic year.

These requirements apply across the UC Berkeley campus. In cases where these requirements cannot be met, or for clarification, please contact the Office of Environment, Health & Safety EH&S at 642 3073 or visit the EH&S web site at http://ehs.berkeley.edu.

Controlling Clutter

Controlling clutter in campus laboratories requires all of the following:

Aisles, exits, and hallways are to be clear of obstructions and slipping or tripping hazards (eg., pipette tips on the floor).

Access must not be blocked to any of the following:

- Eyewash/safety showers
- Electrical panels keep clear at least 36 inches in front of these
- Fire extinguishers
- Chemical storage cabinets
- Fume hoods
- Waste containers

Fume hoods are to be kept free of clutter and not used for long term storage of equipment, chemicals, or supplies that are not regularly used in the fume hood.

Personnel must be able to see clearly through the protective glass sashes on fume hoods. Minimize postings and writing on sashes.

Containers of unwanted materials including trash should be emptied on a regular

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basis and must never reach the point of overflowing.

There must be 18 inches of clearance from the top of stored materials to the ceiling in laboratories with fire sprinklers, and 24 inches if no sprinklers are present.

Excess materials are to be stored in a neat, secure manner that provides easy access and reduces the potential for falling, collapsing, rolling, or spreading of the material. Overhead storage is to be limited to lightweight, non hazardous items.

Chemical containers, supplies, and equipment are to be stored away from the edges of benches and shelves unless shelf lips or other restraints are in place. Precariously stored items are to be relocated.

- Containers holding chemicals should not be stored on the floor. When this is unavoidable, such containers are to be stored in plastic tubs or other secondary containment.

Chemical containers must never be stored directly on top of one another unless in original boxes that can be safely stacked , and/or with incompatible chemicals such as acids with bases, or flammables with oxidizers).

Bench areas containing radioactive materials are to be clearly marked with radiation tape and sorbent pads.

All spills are to be cleaned up promptly. There are to be no puddles, powders, or unknown materials on floors or work surfaces.

Sharp objects are to be stored so as to prevent any cut or puncture hazard.

Daisy chaining of extension cords and/or power strips is not permitted.

Equipment, chemicals, glassware, and supplies not in regular use are to be stored in areas other than work stations.

Leg space beneath benches and desks is not be used for storage in a way that prevents proper ergonomic posture.

Personal desk spaces and other “clean areas” near or in the laboratory are to be kept free of all hazardous research materials.

Hazardous materials are never to be stored in refrigerators that contain food.

Food is to be eaten or stored only in designated areas.

- Sufficient open space is available within the laboratory to manage the acquisition and disposition of materials.