Safety Culture (excerpts from the OSHA website)

Safety cultures consist of shared beliefs, practices, and attitudes that exist at an establishment. Culture is the atmosphere created by those beliefs, attitudes, etc., which shape our behavior. In a strong safety culture, everyone feels responsible for safety and pursues it on a daily basis; employees go beyond "the call of duty" to identify unsafe conditions and behaviors, and intervene to correct them. Likewise coworkers routinely look out for one another and point out unsafe behaviors to each other. A university with a strong safety culture typically experiences few at-risk behaviors, consequently they also experience low incident rates, low turnover, low absenteeism, and high productivity. They are usually universities who are extremely successful by excelling in all aspects of research and academic excellence. Creating a safety culture takes time. It is frequently a multi-year process. A series of continuous process improvement steps can be followed to create a safety culture. Employer and employee commitment are hallmarks of a true safety culture where safety is an integral part of daily operations.

Compressed Gas Notice

The Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) has become aware of a few incidents at other universities where certain lecture bottles have failed and exploded. This has been a result of either corrosion or the breakdown in the inhibitor for certain gases. For hydrogen fluoride (HF) and hydrogen bromide (HBr), the slow corrosion reaction with iron in lecture bottles contributes to the separation / dissociation of the respective compounds forming hydrogen. The hydrogen pressure can then build up to the point where it ruptures the cylinder. With hydrogen cyanide (HCN), the depletion of the acid stabilizer / inhibitor that occurs after 30-90 days causes rapid polymerization and hydrogen (H2) generation causing a violent "detonation" of the cylinder. It is important that if you use these gases that you manage them properly in your laboratory. HF and HBr should not be kept for more than one year. HCN has a shelf life of 30 days and should be disposed of after this period. Please contact the EHS Office at (617) 373-2769 or email ehs@neu.edu with any questions.
Hotplate Advisory

Spontaneous and unexpected heating of hotplates has been the cause of laboratory fires and explosions at a number of universities. The hotplates involved in these fires are Corning models PC-35 and PC-351 and the Thermolyne SP46925. The issue with these hotplates is that they may spontaneously heat in the OFF position. If you have one of these models, EHS is recommending that you take it out of service.

Please note that if only stirring is required, use a regular stirrer instead of a hotplate stirrer. Use hotplates with two independent temperature control circuits that switch off if overheating occurs. Unplug inactive heating mantles or hotplates, especially when near oil baths or flammable/combustible materials.

Please contact the EHS Office at (617) 373-2769 or email ehs@neu.edu with any questions.

Sharps Disposal Locations

To improve convenience for lab personnel, the sharps disposal program was decentralized and EHS no longer holds waste room hours in 319A Mugar. Designated disposal locations have been established in many of the autoclave facilities on campus and they now function as a sharps distribution in addition to a disposal location. Each site is stocked with sharps containers, in addition to pipet keepers and Bio-bins for the disposal of serological pipets and pipet tips contaminated with biohazardous materials. If your sharps container is full, follow these steps:

1. Properly close and disinfect the container
2. Write the PI’s name and lab location on the container
3. Safely transport it to the disposal location and place it inside of an incineration box
4. Ensure that the disposal locations remain clean and uncluttered

Feel free to contact the site coordinator with any questions regarding the disposal location. For a list of sharps disposal locations and further information, please visit http://www.ehs.neu.edu/biosafety/biohazardous_waste/ or contact EHS via email at ehs@neu.edu or by phone at (617) 373-2769.