

Appendix C:

Working Alone

Whenever possible, laboratory personnel should avoid working alone when conducting research, especially when experiments involve hazardous substances and procedures. Laboratories should establish specific guidelines and standard operating procedures specifying when working alone is not allowed and develop notification procedures when working alone occurs. See section 12.10.5 “Prior Approval”.

If a laboratory worker determines it is necessary to work alone, consideration should be given to notifying someone else in the area – in an adjacent room, another lab on the same floor, or a lab on a different floor. It is recommended that a “buddy system” be established for regular, routine checks on personnel working alone, such as every 15-30 minutes, to ensure that no accidents have occurred. This could be accomplished by physically walking to the room where the lab worker is or through the use of a phone. A system of visual checks should be established to indicate there are no problems or to determine if help is needed.

Please note: For rooms that are locked due to security needs, prior arrangements need to be made to allow the designated buddy access. However, please be aware that Emergency Responders may not always have access to locked doors – which could result in a delay in response in the event of an emergency. Also understand that if the door to the lab does not have a window, or if the window is covered, then there is a chance that if something happened to a person working alone in a locked lab, then they may not be discovered until someone else from the lab goes into the room (which could be a day or more).

Examples of activities where working alone would be permissible include:

- Office work such as writing papers, calculations, computer work, and reading.
- Housekeeping activities such as general cleaning, reorganization of supplies or equipment, etc., as long as no moving of large quantities of chemicals is involved.
- Assembly or modification of laboratory apparatus when no chemical, electrical, or other physical hazards are present.
- Routine lab functions which are part of a standard operating procedure which has been demonstrated to be safe and not involve hazardous materials.

Examples of activities where working using a “buddy system” should be considered include:

- Experiments involving toxic or otherwise hazardous chemicals, especially poison inhalation hazards.
- Experiments involving pyrophoric chemicals
- Experiments involving high-pressure equipment
- Experiments involving large quantities of cryogenic materials
- Experiments involving work with unstable (explosive) materials.
- Experiments involving Class 3b or 4 LASERS
- Transfer of large quantities of flammable materials, acids, bases, and other hazardous materials
- Changing out compressed gas cylinders containing hazardous materials.

(Excerpted from the UTK-EHS Lab Safety Manual; retrieved July 24, 2017)