



TEMPLE UNIVERSITY-OF THE COMMONWEALTH  
SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION  
Environmental Health & Radiation Safety

**EHRS FACT SHEET  
WORKING ALONE IN LABORATORIES**

**I. GENERAL PRECAUTIONS**

Working alone in any laboratory creates increased risk to the health and safety of laboratory personnel. Such risks include not having access to basic first aid and the possibility of being unable to summon emergency assistance.

It is the responsibility of Chairs, Center Directors, Principal Investigators, faculty members and laboratory supervisors to ensure procedures for working in laboratories during times of limited occupancy are developed and followed by personnel working in laboratories under their supervision. Careful consideration must be given when granting permission to work alone on laboratory related tasks. This should apply to any tasks that take place in the laboratory including administrative tasks, computer-based activities, cleaning activities or other related tasks, since all activities that take place in the laboratory have the potential to put individuals at increased risk.

The following guidelines below will aid in protecting the health and safety of laboratory personnel, while minimizing risks associated with working in laboratories during times of limited occupancy, such as evenings, weekends and holidays and/or working alone.

1. The Department/Center and the Principal Investigators/Supervising Faculty should establish specific policies and procedures on working alone for their areas.
2. All operations involving individuals working alone should be approved by the Department Chair/Center Director and the Principal Investigator/Supervising Faculty.
3. The Principal Investigator(s) or Supervising Faculty Member(s) is responsible for ensuring appropriate supervision of their laboratories. Nobody under the age of 18 is allowed to work in a laboratory that contains hazardous materials or operations without prior written approval from EHRS, the Department chair, and Risk Management.
4. Department/Center and the Principal Investigators/Supervising Faculty are reminded that undergraduate students are not permitted to work alone or without

supervision outside of normal working hours in Temple University's teaching and research laboratories.

5. Individuals who are not approved to work alone or unsupervised in the laboratory should not have access/keys to the laboratory. (i.e., the Principal Investigator should not distribute access/keys to undergraduate students and others who are not allowed to be in the laboratory unsupervised).
6. Laboratory procedures should be discussed, and hazardous operations should be identified prior to permitting lab personnel to work alone.
7. Laboratory personnel and Supervising Faculty should establish and maintain a weekly work schedule and minimize the opportunities when laboratory personnel are alone in the laboratory.
8. The PI should implement appropriate measures that will ensure that they are made aware of when an individual will be working alone in such Principal Investigator\Supervising Faculty member's laboratory.
9. The Principal Investigator\Supervising Faculty should ensure that their respective laboratories are adequately equipped with a working telephone and that such telephones are conspicuously available; especially to individuals working alone. **Individuals are reminded to contact Campus Police at 1-1234 (215-204-1234) in the event of an emergency.**
10. For individuals who are permitted to work unsupervised in the laboratory (for example, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows), the "buddy system" is strongly recommended. (i.e. another individual (a buddy) capable of providing on-site assistance in the event of an emergency should be identified, designated and be accessible.)

## **II. PRECAUTIONS INVOLVING HAZARDOUS MATERIALS OR PROCESSES**

The Temple University Chemical Hygiene Guide restricts working alone when the procedures being conducted involve toxic or hazardous chemicals or processes. *Prudent Practices in the Laboratory* by the National Research Council states that "it is prudent practice to avoid working alone at the bench in a laboratory building. Experiments known to be hazardous should not be undertaken by a worker who is alone in a laboratory." According to *Prudent Practices in the Laboratory*, the definition of "alone" is beyond visible or audible range of another individual for a few minutes at a time.

The following laboratory tasks should never be conducted when alone:

- Procedures involving toxic or hazardous materials.
- Procedures involving high-pressure equipment.
- Procedures involving cryogenic materials.
- Transferring large quantities of hazardous materials.

Please contact EHRS at 2-2520 (215-707-2520) if you have any questions or concerns related to working alone in a laboratory.