Procedures for Working Alone in Campus Laboratories and Instructional Shops

General Policy

The Working Alone policy and procedures are intended to promote employee awareness and facilitate employee safety when they are working alone. The College of Staten Island will ensure that there are safety plans in place for those who work alone. The College will ensure, applying all reasonable measures, the protection of faculty, staff, and students who are performing their duties in areas or under conditions where they are required to be on their own. This policy applies to all faculty, staff, and students who work or perform research on CSI-CUNY premises. This policy does not address those who may be required to work off campus or in a field research capacity.

Researchers and employees working alone in a laboratory or instructional shop can be placed at a greater risk than when working as part of a research team. Workers who are required to work alone may require assistance if they are exposed to conditions that may result in a job related injury, health impairment of any kind, victimization through criminal violence, or other adverse conditions. While the University acknowledges that working alone is sometimes necessary, there are specific safety concerns that need to be addressed. In Appendix A of OSHA standard 29 CFR 1910.1450, the National Research Council (NRC) recommends the following in terms of working alone in the laboratory:

“Avoid working alone in a building; do not work alone in a laboratory if the procedures being conducted are hazardous.”

Although the Council’s recommendations are not mandated by OSHA, laboratory supervisors, P.I.s and instructional shop personnel are strongly encouraged to follow them. Whenever possible, laboratory and instructional shops personnel should avoid working alone when conducting research/work, especially when experiments involve hazardous substances, procedures or equipment. In addition, the FDNY requires that any ongoing laboratory operation be under the personal supervision of a C-14 Certificate of Fitness holder (Certificate of Fitness for the Supervision of Chemical Laboratories). Therefore, anyone working alone must have a C-14 Certificate of Fitness.

Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of P.I.s, laboratory and instructional shop supervisors to ensure that procedures for working alone are developed and followed by personnel working in laboratories and instructional shops under their supervision. The P.I. shall be aware at all times of all work being performed in the laboratory and shall ensure that at least one holder of a Certificate of Fitness for the Supervision of Chemical Laboratories (C-14) be present while the laboratory is in operation.
Laboratories and instructional shops should establish specific guidelines and SOPs specifying when working alone is not allowed and develop notification procedures when working alone occurs. All work to be performed by someone working alone, and the monitoring system that is established, must be approved in advance by the P.I., laboratory or instructional shop supervisor.

The following responsibilities are assigned to employees

P.I.s are required to:
• Review all workplaces under their jurisdiction
• Identify individuals required to work alone
• Identify hazard(s) and assess risk(s)
• Take any necessary steps to eliminate the hazard(s)
• Eliminate the hazard(s) and minimize the risk(s) from the hazard(s) by using engineering controls, administrative controls or a combination of the two controls
• Develop a site-specific Working Alone or in Isolation Policy and Procedure to address the risk(s)
• Communicate the site-specific Working Alone Policy and Procedure to all workers under their jurisdiction
• Ensure understanding and compliance with the Policy and Procedure
• Review the site-specific Policy and Procedure annually
• Maintain documentation of the site-specific Working Alone Policy and Procedure within each department.

Individuals working alone or in isolation will:
• Comply with the site-specific Working Alone Policy
• Advise the supervisor of arising concerns.

Environmental Health and Safety will provide guidance and act as a resource.

When working alone in a laboratory or instructional shop consider the following precautions that may help mitigate or prevent an accident or injury to the person working alone:

• Working alone, especially after hours, should be avoided whenever possible.
• Conduct a Hazard Assessment of the work being performed and the risks and emergency requirements for working alone or after hours.
• Worker should have a phone immediately available and should be in contact with another person (who knows that he or she is being relied upon) at least every 30 minutes.
• Use the buddy system. Individuals working in separate laboratories/instructional shops outside of working hours should make arrangements to check on each other periodically, or ask security guards to check on them.
Examples of activities where working alone would be understandable include:
• Office work such as writing papers, calculations, computer work, and reading.
• Housekeeping activities such as general cleaning, reorganization of supplies or equipment, 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 that are part of a standard operating procedure that 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 those with poison inhalation hazards.
• Experiments involving high-pressure equipment.
• Experiments involving large quantities of cryogenic materials.
• Experiments involving work with unstable (explosives) materials.
• Experiments involving class 3b or class 4 LASERS.
• Experiments around high voltage
• Transfer of large quantities of flammable materials, acids, bases, or other hazardous materials.
• Changing out compressed gas cylinders containing hazardous materials.
• Work involving entry into a confined space
• Certain machine shop activities, e.g. lathe, grinding, welding work.

Buddy System while Working Alone

If a laboratory or instructional shop worker determines that 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 (e.g., every 15 – 30 minutes) to ensure that no accidents have occurred. This could be accomplished by physically walking to the engaged laboratory/shop, by phone, or by CCTV. If the person working alone is engaged in highly hazardous work, the person checking on the lab/shop worker should not enter the room unless they are properly trained and equipped.

In the event of an emergency that requires the buddy to leave prior to the completion of an experiment involving highly hazardous chemicals, the buddy should notify the campus Office of Public Safety of the name, location, and end time of the experiment/work involved.
The buddy should also notify the person conducting the experiment/work. The person conducting the experiment/work should make an effort to complete it in a safe manner and notify the campus Office of Public Safety upon completion of the experiment/work.

*Under no circumstances should a campus public safety officer be used in place of a “lab buddy.”*

**PLEASE NOTE:** For rooms that are locked because of security needs, prior arrangements are required to facilitate buddy access. Be aware that emergency responders and/or campus public safety may not always have immediate access to locked doors, which could result in a delay in response in the event of an emergency. If the door to the lab or shop does not have a window, or if the window is covered, there is a chance that if something happened to a person working alone in a locked lab or shop, they may not be discovered until someone else from the lab or shop goes into the room.

**Phones in Labs/Shops**

All labs and instructional shops are strongly recommended to have a means of communication in the event of an emergency. This can include a “landline” phone, cell phone (if service is available), or two-way radio. If a phone is not available within the room, it is advisable to post a sign and/or map indicating where the nearest phone is located.