

SAFE WORK AUSTRALIA WEEK 2008



Safe Work Australia Week will be held from 19 – 25 October 2008. During this week workplaces across the nation are asked to highlight the importance of safety and health at work. University departments can do this by holding local safety events during SWAW.

Activities to choose from:

- Hold your own safety-themed SWAW morning tea
- Show an OHS video (OHSIM has some for loan)
- Collect OHS suggestions in a suggestions box
- Distribute safe work promotional material
- Conduct a workplace safety inspection
- Do a risk assessment of a task of concern
- Review your safe work procedures
- Conduct a trial evacuation drill
- Meet to discuss and resolve an OHS problem at work

OHSIM is offering a prize for the best SWAW event held within the University. The winning department will receive a visit from the *Five minute Angels* who will provide relaxing massages for the staff who participated in the SWAW event. Register your events by contacting OHSIM.

OHS Officers are available to come to your department for discussion or presentation on particular OHS issues of interest, or to help with your local OHS risk management. If you'd like to book an OHS Officer during SWAW contact OHSIM on ext 14335 or ohsim@usyd.edu.au

2008 OHS AWARD

OHSIM is now seeking nominations for the University's annual OHS award – the Peter Dunlop Memorial OHS Award. The award recognises individual staff members or groups of employees who have made a significant contribution to improving health and safety at the University of Sydney.

Nominations should be made in writing, explaining how the nominee/s has/have contributed to improving health and safety **beyond their normal duties**. Each nomination should be supported by 3 or more members of staff. Nominations (by mail, email or fax) should reach Wendy Collis, OHS & Injury Management, K07, by COB on Monday 6th October 2008. For more information, contact OHS & Injury Management on 9351 4335. The winner will be announced at the Award ceremony on 24th November in the Darlington Centre.

LASER POINTERS

The use of laser pointers to interfere with aircraft has recently been in the news. The NSW Police now regard certain laser pointers as a prohibited weapon. Recent changes to NSW legislation requires that users of laser pointers with a power output of greater than 1 milli-watt [mW] will require a “permit to use” from the Police Department. This will be effective from 1 December 2008. Laser pointers are in common use in the University, particularly in lecture theatres.



The Radiation Safety Committee recommends that only laser pointers not exceeding 1mW should be used in the University. However it is recognised that “green light” laser pointers are currently in use and these do exceed this 1 mW level. The use of this type of laser pointer is not recommended, however they can be used if the person obtains a permit.

Any laser pointer with a power output exceeding 5 mW **MUST NOT BE USED**. “Green light” laser pointers are available in powers well above the 5 mW level and the safety requirements for this class of laser, as detailed in the Laser Safety Standard AS 2211, can **NOT** be complied within a lecture theatre situation. Staff should check the power output of their laser pointers. If the pointer exceeds:

- 1 mW – a permit to use must be applied for
- 5 mW – it should no longer be used

If the power is unknown the pointer should not be used until this can be determined.

Further information about how to apply for permits can be obtained from Howard Ackland, the University Radiation Safety Officer, on ext 17722 or howarda@usyd.edu.au

WHAT IS UNDER YOUR LAB BENCH??

Recently the Faculty of Pharmacy identified an old bottle of Perchloric Acid that was being stored in an under bench cupboard with a number of incompatible organic materials. The bottle had formed a large head of crystals around its lid. Although OHSIM regularly arranges the disposal of “legacy” chemicals, which can include Perchloric Acid, consultation with the School of Chemistry confirmed that with this bottle the crystals around the lid were likely to be unstable and potentially explosive perchlorates. The University’s chemical hazardous waste contractor advised that they would not collect the item due to it being too unstable to handle.

The laboratory and surrounding areas were then evacuated while the situation was assessed further, but given the uncertainty about the potential risk of an explosion it was decided that assistance from the emergency services was required.

On the morning of Monday 28th July 2008 the Faculty of Pharmacy, Security Patrol, Campus Infrastructure Services and the Media Officer were notified by OHSIM of the situation and its potential implications. OHSIM then contacted the NSW Fire Brigade Hazardous Materials Unit (HAZMAT) and after discussion with their scientific advisor it was agreed that both HAZMAT and the NSW Police Bomb Squad would attend.

The NSW Police Bomb Squad took control of the incident once they arrived on site at the University, with the support of HAZMAT and the Ambulance Service. The particular item was removed from the Pharmacy building and detonated inside a NSW Police detonation/containment unit, which was positioned in Technology Lane. Unfortunately this caused additional disruption to the University as adjoining and down-wind buildings had to be evacuated due to the toxic combustion products that resulted from the detonation. There were no injuries or any property damage sustained during the incident and the support provided by emergency services staff and the University’s Security Patrol was excellent.

This incident highlights the importance of having a thorough inventory of what item/substances are being stored in your laboratory/workspace. Processes such as keeping accurate chemical inventories; recognizing which items may become unstable over time; minimising the volumes of chemicals kept in your laboratory and conducting regular monitoring and stock-takes can not be underestimated.

A proforma for keeping a register of Hazardous Substances can be found at: http://www.usyd.edu.au/ohs/docs/ohs/HazSubs_DG%20Register.XLS

Laboratories should also conduct “exit procedures” at the end of projects to ensure that any hazardous materials are handed over or disposed of and that no items are left behind to become a tainted legacy of previous research and/or researchers.



Information regarding Waste Avoidance and Minimisation can be found at: http://www.usyd.edu.au/ohs/ohs_manual/hazwaste.shtml#6

UNI COLD ON DOMESTIC FRIDGES

Did you know that there are specific safety requirements for fridges and freezers to ensure that they are suitable for laboratory environments? If your laboratory uses or stores flammable liquids all ignition sources (eg. naked flames, hot surfaces, GPOs and electrical equipment) must be excluded from the floor and bench areas of the laboratory, to a height of 0.3m above the floor and bench. The Australian Standards refer to these areas as ‘hazardous areas’ – areas where a flammable or explosive environment may exist. Domestic fridges and freezers are **NOT** suitable for storage within a laboratory as they have electrical and refrigeration components that under normal operation may spark and could ignite flammable vapours in the laboratory.

‘**Laboratory grade**’ fridges and freezers are required for use in hazardous areas. These must have:

- top-mounted refrigeration systems well above the 0.3m hazardous area zone; and/or
- ‘explosion protection techniques’ (as per AS/NZS 2381:2005) incorporated into the design of the unit that effectively protect or enclose all ignition sources e.g. non-sparking, encapsulated, flameproof enclosure, safe, etc.

Refrigerated storage of flammable liquids

Prior to storing flammable liquids **within** a fridge you must check with the supplier that there are not ignition sources within the fridge storage chamber (eg light, thermostats, or door switch etc) that could ignite solvent vapours inside the unit. These fridges should be clearly labelled as “spark-free” or “explosion proof – for storage of flammable liquids/or materials”. For further information refer to the following Australian Standards - AS/NZS 2430.3.6:2004, AS/NZS 60079.10:2004 and AS/NZS 61241.3&10:2005 or contact Matthew Mitchell at OHSIM on ext 69098 or mmitchell@usyd.edu.au

Address Label

This and other OHSIM Newsletters are also available on our website at www.usyd.edu.au/ohs/news.