

University of Pittsburgh Safety Manual	EH&S Guideline Number 03-020	
Subject: WORKING ALONE IN LABORATORIES	Effective Date: 04/04/2011 Review Date: 06/01/2026	Page 1 of 2

WORKING ALONE IN LABORATORIES

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.

The University of Pittsburgh's Chemical Hygiene Plan restricts working alone in the laboratory when conducting research, especially when procedures involve hazardous chemicals. *Prudent Practices in the Laboratory* by the National Research Council states "Generally it is prudent 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 the laboratory."

1. The following laboratory tasks should never be conducted when alone:
 - 1.1. Procedures involving toxic or hazardous chemicals.
 - 1.2. Procedures involving high-pressure equipment.
 - 1.3. Procedures involving cryogenic materials.
 - 1.4. Transferring large quantities of hazardous materials.
2. Following the 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, or holidays.
 - 2.1. Laboratory personnel must obtain permission from the principal investigator (PI) or responsible faculty member prior to working in a laboratory during times of limited occupancy.
 - 2.2. Principal investigators and responsible faculty should establish specific guidelines and develop notification procedures when working in laboratories during times of limited occupancy.
 - 2.3. Laboratory procedures should be discussed, and hazardous operations should be identified prior to permitting lab personnel to work alone.
 - 2.4. Laboratory personnel and supervising faculty should establish and maintain a weekly work schedule and minimize the opportunities when laboratory personnel are alone in the lab.
 - 2.5. A telephone must be immediately available to the individual working alone. Contact University Police (412) 624- 2121 in the event of an emergency.
 - 2.6. Another individual capable of providing on-site assistance in the event of an emergency should be accessible.

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3. It is the responsibility of Principal Investigators, faculty members and laboratory supervisors to ensure procedures for working in laboratories during times of limited occupancy are developed and are followed by personnel working in laboratories under their supervision. Careful consideration must be given when granting permission to work alone on administrative tasks, computer-based activities, cleaning activities or other laboratory-related tasks.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROCEDURES
Campus Emergency Number: 412-624-2121

Fire:

1. Close door to contain smoke or fire.
2. Pull alarm and evacuate using stairs.
3. Call 412-624-2121 from a safe area.

Major Chemical Spill:

1. Evaluate and assess the situation.
2. Evacuate area if necessary and call 412-624-2121 from a safe area.

Personal Injury Needing Emergency Medical Care:

1. Call 412-624-2121.

If you have any questions or concerns related to working alone in a laboratory, please contact EH&S at 412-624-9505.