



UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN CAPE (UWC)

POLICY ON HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE FACULTY OF NATURAL SCIENCES

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Case 6/1



University of the Western Cape
Faculty of Natural Sciences

Policy on Health and Safety In
The Faculty of Natural Sciences

Adopted August 2006

1. **INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this document is to provide staff and students of the faculty with guiding principles around issues of health and safety. This is to ensure that minimum standards are complied with and that every member of faculty is provided with a safe working environment, whereby everyone is protected from health and safety hazards. The document also aims to clearly define the responsibilities of supervisors and laboratory and other workers in ensuring a safe working environment.

Some Definitions:

Teaching Laboratory.	A laboratory where students undergo practical training and where students perform experimental procedures as part of any approved module or course of the university. Although this would largely be applicable to undergraduate students, it could also involve postgraduate students e.g. Honours students
Research Laboratory.	A laboratory whose primary use is to conduct research and to provide students with advanced training in laboratory practice.
Principal Investigator (Supervisor)	A person who leads a research project/group and who has the responsibility to supervise students and other co-researchers.
Laboratory Worker	Any person who performs any practical procedures in a laboratory. This includes students, post-docs and research assistants. Note: Supervisors themselves may fall under this as they also perform procedures in the lab from time to time.
Hazardous Material	Any chemical, biological or radioactive material that may pose a health or safety threat to anyone exposed to it.

2. **HEALTH AND SAFETY-RESPONSIBILITIES.**

Health and safety is the joint responsibility of all parties linked to a particular working space. However the nature of the responsibility might differ depending on the function and role of the person concerned. It should however be stated that the main responsibility for health and safety for a particular workspace is that of the supervisor. In the case of undergraduate labs the responsibility lies with the chairperson of the department. In addition it should be noted that the overall responsibility for safety within a department resides with the chairperson of the department.

2.1 *Responsibilities of Supervisors of Research Laboratories*

The supervisor of a laboratory has overall responsibility for safety in the particular lab. The supervisor should conduct regular safety and housekeeping checks. Records of these checks should be kept on file.

The supervisor would be responsible for the following prior to any new laboratory worker being allowed to conduct any work in the laboratory.

- a) Ensure that individuals be given an appropriate safety orientation when they join the supervisor's laboratory.
- b) That all laboratory workers attend the prescribed training provided or organized by Health and Safety Office of the University. (This includes fire fighting, handling of chemical and biohazards, chemical waste management,)
- c) That workers are made aware of safety rules and that these are adhered to.
- d) Ensure that training on special or unusual hazards in non-routine work is provided to laboratory workers.
- (e) Ensure that all lab workers are familiar with the location of the closest first aid kit and that there at least one member in the lab with up-to-date first aid training.

A record of any training provided to all laboratory workers should be kept on file.

In addition the supervisor is also responsible for the following:

- a) That appropriate emergency equipment in proper working order is readily available.
- b) That workers in his/her laboratory have been properly trained in the use of laboratory specific emergency equipment and emergency response is in place.
- c) That an accident/incident report is completed for every accident or incident; which occurs in her/his lab or involving his/her students. This include: accidents requiring first aid, spills, fires, explosions, exposure to biological hazards or harmful radiation and other near misses;
- d) The appointment of an acting supervisor when the laboratory supervisor is absent for extended periods.
- e) The posting of appropriate safety signs within the working space under his/her control. This should be done in consultation with SHE office of the university.
- f) Appropriate labeling of chemicals and other hazardous materials under his/her control.

2.2 *Responsibilities of Laboratory Worker:*

Every Person working in a laboratory is responsible for:

- a) Following all applicable safety regulations and practices as conveyed to him/her by the supervisor and obtained as part of the prescribed safety training.
- b) Using and wearing the appropriate personal protective apparel according to instructions from the supervisor and safety officers of the university.
- c) Immediately reporting all accidents/incidents to their laboratory supervisor.
- d) Bringing all unsafe conditions to the attention of their laboratory supervisor;
- e) Completion of any recommended occupational health screening programmes when required to do so.
- f) Attending all safety-training courses prescribed by the supervisor and offered by the health and safety office.

2.3 *Teaching Laboratories:*

Overall responsibility for the teaching laboratories rests with the Departmental Chairperson. However the responsibility of health and safety during a particular practical session could be delegated to the practical coordinator for the course.

Departmental Chairpersons and Practical Coordinators should ensure that

- All demonstrators receive basic health and safety training at the start of each academic year.
- Demonstrators are briefed about the hazards of each practical before the start of the practical session.
- All students are informed of the safety regulations of the department and ensure that these are enforced. It is suggested that students sign some sort of form indicating that they are aware of the safety regulations and that they undertake to adhere to these.
- All students are made aware of the emergency procedures in case of a health and safety threat.
- An accident/incident report is completed for every accident or incident; which occurs during any practical session. This include: accidents requiring first aid, spills, fires, explosions, exposure to biological hazards or harmful radiation and other near misses. These reports should be submitted to the departmental chairperson who forwards it to the faculty safety committee. Copies of these reports should also be kept on departmental files.

In addition to the general policy outlined here, it is envisaged that each department develops a generic safety manual for laboratories under its control.

3. ENFORCEMENT OF SAFETY POLICY:

Due to the previous high degree of non-compliance with health and safety regulations across the faculty it is imperative that a stringent policy of compliance enforcement will be adopted. This section outlines the guiding principles of how to deal with issues of non-compliance. Violations have been categorized as either major or minor.

3.1 *Major Violations:*

A major violation would be something, which poses an imminent risk to the health and safety of not only people working in the lab but also to the environment and the surrounding community. Examples of major violations are given below.

- Inappropriate disposal of chemical and biological waste
- Causing leaks of toxic gasses
- Contamination of water systems
- Unsafe use of laboratory equipment
- Inappropriate storage of chemicals
- Unsafe handling of biohazards
- Providing inadequate training of laboratory personnel
- Unsafe handling and storage of radioactive materials
- Refusing to attend prescribed health and safety training
- Unsafe handling and storage of radioactive materials
- Unsafe handling of incendiary materials

3.2 *Examples of Minor Violations*

A minor violation would be something, which does not pose an immediate threat to safety, health or the environment. Examples of minor violations are:

- Absent of safety signage
- Unlabeled materials
- Inappropriate clothing for laboratory work
- Failing to report accidents/incidents

3.3 *Offence Actions*

Below is a description of the proposed actions that could be taken when health and safety violations occur.

3.3.1 *Major Offence Actions:*

(a) *First Offence:* A written notification will be sent by the Health and Safety Officer to the Lab supervisor with copies to Departmental Chairperson and Chairperson of the Faculty Safety Committee. Immediate corrective action of the violation would be required with a written reply to be submitted within 7 days. If a written reply is not received after 7 days, a second notice will be copied to the Dean and a meeting will be arranged with the laboratory supervisor, Departmental Chairperson, SHE Officer and Chairperson of the faculty Safety Committee. If there is no response from the Principal Investigator (Supervisor) after 7 days of second notice, then disciplinary action could be initiated against the offender.

(b) *Second Offence:* The Laboratory Supervisor will be notified in writing by the Chairperson of the Faculty Safety Committee that laboratory work will be suspended until a meeting with the Dean can be held to discuss the offence(s).

(c) *Third Offence:* SHE Officer will recommend to Dean that the laboratory be closed until full compliance is achieved. Disciplinary measures against laboratory supervisor might also be initiated.

3.3.2 *Minor Offence Actions*

(a) *First Offence:* A written notification will be sent to Laboratory Supervisor, with a copy to Departmental Chairperson and the chairperson of the Faculty Safety Committee. Corrective action of the violation is required, with a written reply within 21 days. If the written reply is not received after 21 days, a second notice will be copied to the Dean. A meeting will be arranged with the Laboratory Supervisor, Departmental Chairperson, SHE officer and chairperson of the Faculty Safety Committee if there is no response from the Laboratory Supervisor after 14 days of second notice.

(b) *Second Offence:* A meeting will be arranged with Laboratory Supervisor, Departmental Chairperson, SHE officer and the chairperson of the Faculty Safety Committee to review the issues.

(c) *Third Offence:* The Laboratory Supervisor will be notified in writing by chairperson of the Faculty Safety Committee that work in the laboratory will be suspended until a meeting with the Dean can be held to discuss the offence.

4. *Fourth Offence:* The SHE Officer will recommend to Dean that the laboratory be closed until full compliance is achieved. Disciplinary measures against laboratory supervisor might also be initiated.

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