

Laboratory Safety

Scientists responsible for laboratories should be aware of several basic safety/security measures that can help them protect themselves, their research, and others. The following information is designed to help scientists secure their laboratories. Additional information and site inspections can be arranged through the NMSU Environmental Health & Safety Office and/or NMSU Police Department.

Chemical Inventories

One of the basic (but very important) measures a scientist can take is to have an accurate, up-to-date inventory of all chemicals, biological agents, and hardware in their laboratories. This inventory will help the scientist notice if something is missing, ensure all containers are properly labeled, and provide an opportunity to decide whether or not old items need to be retained. Inventories should be performed at least quarterly (every three months). If an item is found missing, a quick check with colleagues should be performed, and then it should be reported promptly. (NOTE: More information on this topic is available through the Environmental Health and Safety Office website at www.nmsu.edu/~safety.)

Use Locks

All laboratories should have deadbolt locks on all of their doors. The doors themselves should be fire-rated. Anytime a lab is not occupied, the doors should be locked. This helps keep out unauthorized individuals who may damage research (either intentionally or, most likely, as a result of unintentional actions resulting from curiosity) or take chemicals or laboratory equipment. Laboratory chemicals and equipment can be used in the manufacture of illegal drugs, as well as other dangerous and illegal products.

Consider Alarms

If the laboratory contains sensitive research or chemicals/equipment that are prone to theft, scientists responsible for the laboratories may want to consider having an intrusion alarm installed. All alarms on campus are installed and maintained by the Information and Communications Technologies office (call 646-4241 for estimates or more information). The alarms are monitored by the NMSU Emergency Dispatch Center 24-hours a day. **NOTE:** Alarms are not a replacement for use of locks. Any equipment needing extra security should be inside a locked container inside of an alarmed room. This allows the alarm to be triggered and police to respond before the item can be accessed and taken.

MSDS

It is important to keep up-to-date Material Safety Data Sheets in a notebook in designated areas. Frequently, these are mounted on the wall. The MSDS should reflect all chemicals kept in the laboratory, even if just on a temporary basis. (NOTE: Links for obtaining MSDS and additional information on this topic can be found through the Environmental Health and Safety Office website at www.nmsu.edu/~safety.)

Fire Extinguishers and Showers

There should be a fire extinguisher readily available to every laboratory (or within 50 feet).. More research is lost to fire every year than to theft. The fire extinguisher should be rated for the types of materials located in the laboratory. Eye wash stations and emergency showers should also be located in areas where chemicals are used. These should be regularly inspected to make sure they are working properly. (See the Environmental Health and Safety Office website at www.nmsu.edu/~safety for additional information.)