

# Safety Alert

## Unknown chemical in stairwell



**INCIDENT DATE:** January 2026

**SUBJECT:** Unknown chemical in stairwell

### BACKGROUND:

On January 9, 2026, OHSE received a call that there was a portentously hazardous liquid in the stairwell of Petch at the basement level. OHSE went to investigate to find a portable cooler with the lid opened and containing several Nalgene bottles. Four of the bottles were filled with a faint yellow liquid. However, the bottles were not labeled. One of the bottles contained a preserved fish and it was then speculated the liquid was formaldehyde. OHSE relocated the cooler out of the stairwell into a secured area to arrange for hazardous waste disposal.

### INJURIES

No injuries.

### EQUIPMENT DAMAGE

There was no equipment or floor damage.



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#### IMMEDIATE CAUSE

It is speculated the cooler was placed in the stairwell many years ago and left unnoticed until someone on January 9 opened the lid to inspect. It is not clear if it was a from a lab clean out or temporarily put there but forgotten overtime.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS TO PREVENT RECURRENCE

- Remind departments about WHMIS labelling requirements
- Remind departments about proper disposal of hazardous materials
- Remind departments about lab clean-out procedures

More information for WHMIS:

<https://www.uvic.ca/ohse/research-safety/chemical-safety/index.php#ipn-whmis>

More information on hazardous materials disposal:

<https://www.uvic.ca/ohse/environment/hazardous-waste/index.php>

More information on lab clean-out procedures:

<https://www.uvic.ca/ohse/research-safety/laboratory-safety/index.php#ipn-lab-decommissioning>