UVic Laboratory Working Alone Guidelines

1. BACKGROUND

Principal investigators (PI) and lab supervisors are required to assess the risks of working alone in their lab space. Working alone procedures must be in place if laboratory personnel, including faculty, staff, students and visitors, are working alone outside regular hours (8:30am-4:30pm M-F) or during regular hours but in areas with limited access. In all circumstances, lab personnel must have pre-approval from their supervisor to work alone.

Lab personnel are considered to be working alone during a time or in a location when assistance would not be readily available in case of emergency, injury or ill health. Readily available assistance is determined by considering the presence of others in the vicinity, awareness and willingness of others to provide assistance, and the timeliness of assistance that can be provided (1).

Working alone procedures must be reviewed annually by the relevant lab, or Local Safety Committee for departmental protocols.

2. PRE-PLANNING

Laboratory personnel must receive safety and emergency orientation and training before starting work in a lab, and before supervisors can approve personnel to work alone.

a) Training

Authorized lab personnel must have completed training in WHMIS and received hands-on training by qualified personnel on any task assigned. Other training that may have been provided for other lab hazards include biosafety training, radiation safety, laser safety, lab safety, etc. Lab personnel must follow the working alone protocols established by their department, and/or lab-specific procedures established by their Principal Investigator (PI) or Lab Supervisor.

b) Emergency Preparedness

Lab personnel are required to follow safety guidelines, including the use of all appropriate personal protective equipment. In addition, all lab personnel must be familiar with the locations of emergency exits, emergency assembly stations, emergency showers, eyewash stations, and fire extinguishers.

c) Spill Response

The UVic spill response plan includes two scenarios (2).

i) The spill is beyond your capabilities to safely manage

- Call Campus Security at 250-721-7599
- In case of serious injuries, also call 911
- Secure the area and warn others
- If there is a spread of toxic materials, evacuate the building
- Remain near the scene in a safe location
- Identify yourself to the Campus Security Officer upon arrival

ii) The spill can be safely managed by you and your department:

- Get assistance and notify your supervisor. Never rush in or work alone.
- Clearly assess the situation before starting clean up and use proper personal protective equipment.
- Use appropriate departmental spill clean-up equipment if available.
- Laboratories can use the grey spill pads to contain and absorb most liquid spills.
- Collect the wastes in a suitable container and request disposal from OHSE.
- If at any time additional assistance is required, contact Campus Security at 250-721-7599

3. RISK ASSESSMENT

Before lab personnel are permitted to work alone, hazards must be identified, risks evaluated, and controls put in place to eliminate or minimize the risk. This begins with performing a risk assessment (see UVic Laboratory Working Alone Risk Assessment Template). Use the table below to assist with your assessment.

Table 1. Examples of lab research activity risks

Risk	Research Activity Examples
High Risk	• Using high hazard materials (e.g. pyrophoric, explosive, highly reactive, highly toxic chemicals or unsealed radionucleotide sources) • Use of flames including Bunsen burners • Connecting and disconnecting compressed gases • Work with high voltage • Class 3B or Class 4 lasers • Open beam x-ray devices • Tasks which a risk assessment conducted by the supervisor and employee require more than one person
Moderate Risk	• Using moderate hazard materials (e.g. risk group level 2 biohazards, sealed radionuclide sources or non-reactive chemicals)

	• Working with compressed gases (inert) • Operating small and large autoclaves • Transporting heavy materials • Preparing and using disinfecting chemicals or sanitizers • Maintenance work on equipment that may have residual hazardous materials • Interlocked x-ray devices • Interlocked devices containing Class 3B or Class 4 lasers
Low Risk	• Desk and computer work within a laboratory and/or adjacent to hazardous materials • Laboratory work not involving hazardous materials or equipment

4. CONTROLS

Working alone controls are put in place in order to eliminate or minimize the risks to ensure the safety of lab personnel. Typical working alone controls are listed below, including:

a) Restricting Working Alone (eliminate risk)

Lab supervisors may choose to restrict or prohibit working alone for activities that are considered high-risk, during certain times of the day or week, for new or inexperienced personnel, or in other circumstances based on a risk assessment or lab/department policy.

b) Working in Pairs (eliminate risk)

Working in pairs must be done with at least one other person present in the vicinity of the laboratory and immediately available for assistance. It is highly recommended to work in pairs for any high-risk work that has been pre-approved by the supervisor and/or department.

c) Check-in Procedures (minimize risk)

Check-in procedures must be established for all working alone activities approved by the PI/supervisor. This check-in template can be used for activities at all risk levels according to the following protocol:

- Identify the designated check-in person and phone number ahead of time and note on the check-in form.
- Established ahead of time who will be initiating check-ins.
- Check-in interval must be identified on the form based on risk along with check-in method.

- Each check-in must be recorded on the form including date, start time, check-in times and when the session end must be recorded at each check-in on the form.
- If laboratory personnel cannot be contacted during the scheduled check-in interval, the designated contact must conduct an in-person check-in at the lab location, or call Campus Security for a safety and well-being check.

Note: The Campus Alone program (see below) may be utilized as a check-in procedure only for low-risk lab activities. To request this service please contact Campus Security to make arrangements.

5. CAMPUS SECURITY SERVICES

a) Emergency Support

If laboratory personnel require first aid or emergency assistance, University of Victoria Campus Security is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, by calling **250-721-7599**.

b) Campus Alone

Campus Alone is available to all members of the campus community who work or study on campus during the quiet hours of evenings, weekends and holidays. Individuals concerned for their personal safety while working/studying alone at night may telephone Campus Security Services at 250-721-7599 to arrange a check-in based on your estimated departure time from campus.

c) SafeWalk

Campus Security Services provides a safe walk service, which is available to members of the University Community 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This service is provided to escort people from building to building, building to vehicle, and vice versa within the boundaries of the campus, including Ian Stewart Complex.

7. REFERENCES

1. British Columbia *Workers Compensation Act, Guidelines Part 4 – General Conditions,* Sections 4.20.1 - 4.23: Working Alone or in Isolation. Sept. 19, 2023 Retrieved from https://www.worksafebc.com/en/law-policy/occupational-health-safety/searchable-ohs-regulation/ohs-regulation/part-04-general-conditions#SectionNumber:4.20.1ReportID=34868
2. Safehaven/Safewalk/Campus Alone. (2017). University of Victoria Campus Security. Retrieved Sept 19, 2023 from http://www.uvic.ca/security/home/safewalk/index.php