University of Idaho

Environmental Health and Safety

NEWSLETTER

Building a Safety Culture



The Importance of a Safety Culture

Spring 2025 With Dr. Chris Nomura, VP for Research and Economic Development

(answers here have been edited for space)

What does "safety culture" mean to you, and why is it important?

Safety culture means that we are fostering an environment whereby our students, staff, and faculty are working under the best conditions to minimize risks that are exposing them to harm, not just from research enterprise but across all practices at the university. If you have people who are avoiding accidents, you're going to have more successful workers: students, faculty, and staff, just simply from the fact they are not going to be seeking medical attention. This is a really important aspect for the success of our entire institution, not just for research.

What are some tangible benefits of a strong safety culture?

It attracts individuals to the organization who will instill proper safety habits, ensuring that our students train in an environment where safety is paramount. When students learn to prioritize safety, it enhances our institution's reputation, as they become capable of recognizing and maintaining safe working environments in the workforce. Making safety a foundational aspect of our operations is critical for future success. In fields involving potentially harmful substances or processes, a robust safety culture is essential, and the training provided at the university prepares students for such environments.

How can a positive safety culture contribute to the university's success as an R1 institution? A positive safety culture significantly contributes to the university's success as an R1 institution. Our external partnerships are crucial; when organizations recognize that our graduates embody a strong safety culture, they are more likely to collaborate with us through research opportunities, sponsor-

ships, and internships, ensuring that our students are well-prepared to enter the workforce without being a burden. Additionally, safety is essential for productivity; injuries resulting from unsafe practices reduce the time spent on research, which is vital for meeting the metrics necessary for our success. Therefore, safety must be integrated into all aspects of our institutional efforts.



What are some common challenges in building and maintaining a strong safety culture? A common challenge in the academic environment is bad habits that develop due to a historical lack of emphasis on safety culture. These habits can be difficult to change, as individuals often operate without considering safety if it hasn't been a focus.

Safety culture is constantly evolving based on new research and understanding; for instance, practices once deemed acceptable can pose serious risks if not updated, potentially leading to dangerous accidents. It is crucial to implement regular and early training, including orientation on lab and research safety protocols. Understanding that lab shutdowns due to safety concerns are meant to protect everyone—staff, faculty, and students—is essential. Creating a partnership between investigators and EHS is vital for maintaining a culture of safety. Faculty and academic leaders, such as deans and chairs, must prioritize safety with the same seriousness as academic misconduct or harassment. Accountability at all levels is essential to integrate safety as an added value into the institution's fabric; this is critical for fostering a safe and productive environment for all.

Safety Training Access Updates

In January 2024, online safety training for employees moved into Bridge, and remains in Canvas for students and others that cannot access Bridge. There has been no change to accessing an in-person class. The most current class schedule and additional resources for safety training are on our website. If you need a class that isn't scheduled, please contact EHS for assistance.

Safety Training Schedule: uidaho.edu/safety

Bridge@Uofl: https://uidaho.bridgeapp.com/

Canvas: https://canvas.uidaho.edu/

Safety Training Contact: 208-885-6524 | safety@uidaho.edu



TSCA Dichloromethane Rule

In May 2024, the EPA enacted a rule under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) banning most uses of dichloromethane (DCM), also known as methylene chloride. While limited uses remain for laboratories and solvent welding, the ban primarily targets commercial applications like paint stripping and degreasing.

The EPA's review began in 2020, assessing DCM's neurotoxicity and associated risks across various industries. The final management rule was released in May 2024, highlighting the need for compliance.

Key Compliance Dates:

- May 5, 2025: Labs must complete initial monitoring of DCM use.
- October 30, 2025: Labs must develop Exposure Control Plans and SOPs for permitted uses.
- April 28, 2026: All users must cease and dispose of DCM for prohibited applications.

DCM poses serious health risks, including skin and eye irritation, dizziness, and is classified as a probable human carcinogen.

Laboratory Decommissioning Made Easy

As we continue to foster a vibrant research community at the University of Idaho, it is important to ensure that our laboratory spaces are safe and compliant. If you're planning to vacate a lab where chemical, biological, or radioactive materials have been used or stored, we've got you covered with our Lab Decommissioning Procedure!

When Should You Decommission?

There are several scenarios that may require you to decommission your lab, including:

- Ending your affiliation with the University of Idaho
- Moving to a new lab space
- Undergoing major renovations
- Retiring from research activities

Who's in Charge?

The principal investigator (PI) plays a key role in this process, ensuring that all decommissioning requirements are met. If for any reason the PI is unable to oversee this, the responsibility shifts to the department or college administrator, who will ensure that everything is handled smoothly and efficiently.

Shared Spaces Matter!

For those working in shared laboratory environments, it's essential to implement the decommissioning procedure for your designated area. This helps maintain a safe and compliant space for everyone involved.

Why It's Important

Proper decommissioning is not just a formality; it protects our community and the environment. The department will be responsible for any costs or regulatory actions that arise from improper management or disposal of materials, so let's work together to avoid any hiccups!

Thank you for your attention to this important process. By following APM 35.66, we can ensure that our research facilities remain safe and welcoming for all.

Return the completed form to EHS at safety@uidaho.edu or campus mail at MS 2030.



EHS Contacts

In an emergency, call 911

For urgent situations, please call until you connect with someone—do not rely on voice mail, text or email. After hours, contact U of I Security at 208-885-7054.

EHS Email	safety@uidaho.edu
EHS Office	208-885-6524
Executive Director	208-885-6524
Fire Safety	208-885-6525
Hazardous Materials	208-885-6279
Industrial Hygiene	208-885-5977
Laboratory Safety	208-885-5031
Occupational Safety	208-885-6297
Radiation Safety	208-885-6524
Safety Training	208-885-6524

Laser Safety Essentials

Lasers emit highly focused beams of non-ionizing electromagnetic radiation, which can be incredibly powerful. While they are invaluable tools in research, it's

crucial to recognize that direct exposure to a laser beam or even reflected radiation can lead to serious injuries.

Protect Your Vision: Even low-power lasers can pose a risk to your eyes, potentially leading to injuries, including blindness. It's vital to always wear appropriate eye protection when working with lasers, regardless of their power level.

Skin Safety Matters: Moderate to high-power lasers can cause severe burns to the skin. Be aware of your surroundings and ensure that safety measures are in place to protect yourself and your colleagues.

Be Mindful of Collateral Risks, such as:

- Fire or explosions due to high heat production
- Hazardous fumes and particles released during operation
- Exposure to cryogenic gases or high voltages

Your Role in Safety: By understanding these risks and following safety protocols, you play a crucial role in maintaining a safe research environment. Always prioritize safety and refer to the university's Laser Safety Protocol for guidance. Don't hesitate to reach out for training on laser use.

Let's work together to ensure that our research remains cutting-edge and safe for everyone involved. Happy experimenting!



Safety Concern Report

Annual Laboratory Safety Inspections

As we prepare for the 2025 inspection process, I look forward to collaborating with you to ensure our labs meet best practices. My goal is to help identify areas for improvement while considering your resources in meeting regulatory requirements.

Before my visit, please address a few key items from last year's inspection report: ensure your lab door signage is current (effective date within one year) and that the lab safety plan is readily available.

This year, I'll focus on two specific areas during inspections: maintaining accurate chemical inventories and ensuring shower/ eyewash stations are flushed weekly.

Together, we can create a safer and more compliant lab environment! Thank you for your cooperation and commitment to safety.

> Drew Pemberton Lab Safety Officer

