UC SANTA BARBARA

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New Year, New Lab Coats

If you do research in any of the laboratories on campus, particularly those that handle hazardous materials, here's a heads-up: New safety rules now require you to upgrade your personal protective equipment (PPE) to meet recently instituted UC-wide policies. For many researchers on the UCSB campus that means last year's lab coats and other safety gear may need to be retired and replaced with newer versions.

"This is an attempt to improve lab safety, make it a high priority and increase compliance," said David Vandenberg, laboratory safety program manager in UCSB's Office of Environmental Health & Safety. The new policy kicks in on March 31.

Fortunately, EH&S is doing its best to make it easy for the roughly 2,000 people on campus to whom this rule applies. From Feb. 11-13 EH&S staff will be handing out lab coats, eyewear and other equipment to current lab researchers. The distribution will take place at Corwin Pavilion. The specific type of personal protective equipment depends on the types of hazards a researcher might encounter. To determine this, an online UC lab hazard assessment tool is now being used by campus faculty and staff supervisors prior to their workers picking up their gear.

At the distribution event, each researcher will be individually fitted and provided two lab coats and two pairs of protective eyewear. For some workers, special flame-resistant coats will be issued if they use flammable liquids, or pyrophorics. Additionally, recipients will be enrolled in a free laundry service for the coats.

“Many people are wondering why UC is going to all the effort and expense to accomplish this,” said Vandenberg. “What it boils down to is an effort by the University to accomplish two basic things. First, to ensure that every lab worker has the correct basic PPE and that it fits well. Second, this effort satisfies Cal-OSHA requirements which state that the employer must provide an assessment of the PPE needs for each worker; provide the PPE to them; train them on the use and limitations of the gear and provide a method to clean and sanitize the gear. The other requirement that makes this so challenging is that all these steps must be documented. The way we’ve done it in the past did not fully satisfy these requirements.”

After the big giveaway comes the next phase, which involves evaluating campus labs to figure out how they are affected by the new policy.

“Just giving someone a coat and safety glasses is just the beginning,” said Vandenberg. “The policy tries to define a number of related aspects: Which campus labs, or portions of labs, fall under the policy? What PPE is required for a particular type of work? What is needed for those in close proximity — the “splash zone” — to someone who is doing hazardous operations? Campus research labs are very diverse and dynamic places and the university is hoping the policy process can be flexible enough to address that diversity.”

The new lab protective personal equipment policy will join two other safety policies recently instituted by the UC system, which require lab safety training, and regulate the presence of minors in the laboratory. Those two policies went into effect last October. Compliance with all three policies is mandatory; non-compliance can result in Cal-OSHA fines and citations. In the event of an accident, the safety practices of the research group involved may come under scrutiny.

The new safety policies are in part an outgrowth from a 2012 settlement between the UC Regents and the Los Angeles District Attorney, stemming from a fatal laboratory accident at UCLA several years ago. While initially focused on chemistry and biochemistry departments systemwide, the policies were formalized and broadened to include virtually any location in the UC system where chemical and physical hazards may be present.

Fortunately for UCSB, even with the somewhat looser practices that existed before the new systemwide ones, no major laboratory injuries have been reported in many

years.

For more information, contact David Vandenberg at (805) 893-4899 or david.vandenberg@ehs.ucsb.edu, or visit https://www.ehs.ucsb.edu/programs-services/personal-protective-equipmen...

For questions about the online Laboratory Hazard Assessment Tool contact the UC Enterprise Risk Management service desk at erm@ucop.edu, or one of the following:

Hector Acuna at hector.acuna@ehs.ucsb.edu — Animal Resource Center; CA Nanosystems Institute; Geography; Psychology

Jamie Bishop at jamie.bishop@ehs.ucsb.edu — Molecular, Cellular and Dev. Biology; Neuroscience Research Institute

Jim Casto at jim.casto@ehs.ucsb.edu — Mechanical Engineering; Physics

Alessandro Moretto at moretto@chem.ucsb.edu — Chemistry & Biochemistry; Chemical Eng.; Electrical & Computer Eng.; Materials

Nelly Traitcheva at nelly.traitcheva@ehs.ucsb.edu — Anthropology; Bren School; Earth Sci.; Ecology, Evolution & Marine Biology, Marine Sci. Inst.

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