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Eating and Drinking in the Workplace with Particular Reference to Laboratories and Workshops: Policy and Guidance

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Eating and Drinking in the Workplace with Particular Reference to Laboratories and Workshops: Policy and Guidance

1. Introduction

The purpose of this policy and guidance is to facilitate departments and institutions in complying with relevant legislation, thereby protecting the health and safety of the University's employees, students and visitors.

2. Policy

Eating, drinking, the application of cosmetics and smoking* are NOT permitted in any laboratory, workshop, animal accommodation or other area where a significant risk to health and safety could arise as a result of such activities within the University of Cambridge.

This applies to everyone whether employee, student or visitor.

2.1 There must be **NO**

- eating of any food substance, including sweets etc
- drinking of any substance
- chewing gum
- chewing pens, pencils or other items
- taking any medicines/drugs, including insulin and inhalers - **except in an emergency**
- insertion or removal of contact lenses.
- using breath fresheners, lip balms, cosmetics, snuff etc...
- storage of any food, drink or other item that could foreseeably become contaminated in any laboratory, workshop or animal accommodation (including their associated fridges, freezers or cold rooms etc.)
- using food containers or packaging in a laboratory or workshop; unless as an essential part of a risk assessed experiment.
- other activity that might foreseeably result in a person ingesting, injecting or absorbing any potentially harmful substances due to contamination.

2.2 The definition of a laboratory, workshop or animal accommodation includes;

- traditional laboratories where there are chemicals, radio-isotopes, micro-organisms, other hazardous substances or electrical equipment. **The only exceptions being specialised facilities**, where the consumption of food, drink or medicines under controlled conditions is a risk assessed part of an experimental procedure **or where a written risk assessment shows there is NO foreseeable risk of contamination.**
- workshops and plant rooms of any kind e.g. woodworking, machine, electrical, electronic, photographic, printing etc.
- animal accommodation or directly associated facilities

* By law smoking is not permitted inside any workplace / public building from 1 July 2007 see Personnel website: <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/policy/smoking.html>

- 2.3 Conversely **NO** item must be removed from a laboratory or workshop for consumption elsewhere, **unless** as part of a risk assessed experimental procedure ie: **NO**
- water (water in laboratories or workshops is usually unsuitable for drinking)
 - ice from an ice maker or freezer
 - sugar (sucrose or other)
 - alcohol (ethanol or other)
 - dried milk powder or salt etc...
 - vitamins, antibiotics, medicines etc...
 - food or drink from or intended for experimental procedures**
 - any other substance which could be consumed
 - item of equipment for use with food outside of the laboratory or workshop that could have become contaminated in the workplace, ie: no
 - o fridges or freezers
 - o blenders
 - o microwave ovens
 - o pressure cookers
 - o casserole dishes
 - o 'picnic boxes'
 - o other equipment

** It is best practice to take all foodstuffs intended for research out of their commercial packaging before they are taken into the workplace, **unless** it is not experimentally viable to do so. Furthermore they should be marked as 'Not for Consumption' **unless** they form part of a risk assessed procedure involving their consumption under controlled conditions, in which case they should be labelled to that effect.

3. Guidance

- 3.1 Eating, drinking, and the application of cosmetics may be permissible in office type environments that are quite separate and distinct from a workshop, laboratory or animal accommodation and in the absence of other significant risk factors.
- 3.2 Work areas that do not fit the above categories may be authorised for the consumption of food and drink by a department or institution if a written risk assessment concludes that there is **no foreseeable potential risk of contamination with a substance hazardous to health**. All cases should be examined individually taking into account not only health and safety but also factors such as hygiene and nuisance. Their use must be subject to regular review. These areas must also be subject to adequate and regular cleaning proportionate to the usage, to avoid the risk of infestation by vermin / pests such as rodents and cockroaches.
- 3.3 Toilet facilities are generally not suitable for the consumption of food or drink, however they may be appropriate for applying cosmetics or taking some medicines 'in private'. In the past, drinking water taps and fountains have sometimes been located within toilet facilities. This should be avoided in future developments and refurbishments as it is no longer considered acceptable practice.
- 3.5 It must be recognised that rest and meal breaks are essential and that they should be taken away from a person's workstation whenever reasonably practicable. This is particularly important in the case of users of display screen equipment (including computer monitors).
- 3.6 For illustrative examples of guidance see Appendix 1.

4. Hygiene and Good Practice

- 4.1 Departments have a legal obligation to ensure that laboratory coats, overalls, gloves and other potentially contaminated personal protective equipment are not worn or taken into any offices or areas where food and drink is consumed. They must be removed in **and** left in the laboratory or workshop to avoid contaminating other areas.
- 4.2 Hands should be washed on leaving a laboratory or workshop and before eating, drinking etc., as well as **before and after** using the toilet facilities. If there are no washing facilities for doing this within the laboratory or workshop concerned, then consideration should be given to providing them.
- 4.3 All areas used for eating and drinking must be kept clean and rubbish / food waste removed daily.

5. Providing Rest and Meal Break Facilities

Regulation 25 of the Workplace, Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations states that sufficient and suitable facilities for rest and meal breaks shall be provided for employees by an employer ie: in the department / building or at easily accessible shared locations (see appendix 1). These, and other, requirements of Regulation 25 should be considered when allocating space in a department and when planning an extension refurbishment, or new workplace. (It should be remembered that some areas that are suitable for rest breaks may however be unsuitable for drinking and eating)

- 5.1 Regulation 25 only applies to persons that are employed and most students are not employees.
- 5.2 Regulation 25 also relates to facilities for pregnant women and nursing mothers, which would need to be considered on a departmental basis. An empty office, coffee room, clean quiet ante-room or even a first aid room could be considered for this role in lieu of more appropriate facilities.

ALWAYS LABEL CONTAINERS CLEARLY AND UNAMBIGUOUSLY



6. Further Reading

6.1 **Legislation:** available from the University's Safety Office, the Technical Indices website (<http://uk.ihs.com/>) or via the Health and Safety Executive (HSE):

- The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002, as amended 2005
- The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 (in particular Regulation 25)
- The Food Hygiene (England) Regulations 2005
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- The Safety Office (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 - as amended 2002.

6.2 **Guidance:** available on University Safety Office website - <http://www.safety.admin.cam.ac.uk/> including:

- University Food Safety Policy
- Food Safety – An introduction to legislation for University premises
- Catering Options – A guide for departments and faculties
- Staff Kitchens and Tearooms – General hygiene requirements
- Food Hygiene Training Requirements
- Guidance on Departmental Barbecue Safety
- Purchase, Delivery and Storage of Food
- Preparation and Service of Food
- Personal Hygiene Requirements for People Preparing or Serving Food
- Cleaning and Pest Control in Food Preparation Areas
- Food Safety Guidance for departmental Christmas Parties

- Guidance on Managing Risks from Travel, Fieldwork and Work Away
- Guide to hazardous Substance Risk Assessment
- Risk Assessment for Expectant and Nursing Mothers
- Hazardous Substance Policy
- Safe Chemical Practice
- Working Safely with Carcinogens, Mutagens and Substances Toxic to Reproduction
- Safe Storage of Hazardous Chemicals in Stockrooms, workshops and Laboratories
- Risk Assessment handbook
- Your Responsibility for Safety

Appendix 1 Illustrative examples with guidance:

1. Where students are regularly expected to attend consecutive lectures ie: from 1400 hrs to 1700 hrs, and are given little or no opportunity to obtain refreshment from a canteen.

Guidance: It would be reasonable to consider permitting students to take drinks and snacks into lecture theatres or seminar rooms on the condition that they remove all traces of debris prior to vacating the facility, both as a courtesy to others and to prevent hygiene issues developing. Clearly NO hazardous substances, laboratory coats, overalls or other potential sources of contamination could be allowed in these areas. (Note: as 'non-employees' most students are not subject to Regulation 25 of the Workplace, Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations.)

2. Where the premises have a small kitchen for the preparation of drinks and snacks, however there is no space specifically set aside for the consumption of refreshments.

Guidance: It would be reasonable to permit eating and drinking at desks in most offices. Although far from ideal, eating and drinking could also be considered in other locations. This could include at desks in specially designated areas of say a measurement or X-ray laboratory: where these facilities are used for the measurement and characterisation of inert substances only and no hazardous substances are present and there is **NO foreseeable risk of contamination**. However this dispensation should be subject to regular and rigorous review. Furthermore the provision of more appropriate facilities for the consumption of refreshments should be a priority for the department or institution.

3. Where lecture theatres and occasionally even teaching classrooms are used for public functions where food and/or drink will be consumed.

Guidance: In these cases the areas used would be cleared of hazardous substances and thoroughly cleaned before and after use. However the use such facilities for public functions is not best practice and should be subject to risk assessment, including any potential security implications (consumption of alcohol / access to other areas).

4. Where "Communal facilities", such as the University Centre, offer accommodation for rest breaks, however, there are notices to the effect that people should not consume their own food or drink on the premises.

Guidance: This is not at variance with Regulation 25, in as far as people do not have to buy food to use the facilities for rest or a break.

5. Where a laboratory based research project requires the use of potentially edible food or drink in an 'experiment or process'.

Guidance: Food or drink stored or used in a laboratory/workshop must be for research purposes only and should be removed from its original packaging and kept in laboratory-style containers; unless it is not experimentally viable to do so. In both cases **ALL** food or drink stored or used in a laboratory/workshop environment for such purposes must clearly and unambiguously labelled **Not for Consumption**. The only exceptions are specialised facilities, where the consumption of food, drink or medicines under controlled conditions is a risk assessed part of an experimental procedure. After use all food or drink must be spoiled, destroyed or clearly labelled before safe disposal in such a way as to prevent mistaken consumption.

6. Where fieldwork/trips require food and drink to be consumed at or near the work place in the 'field' with no practicable access to catering or other facilities.

Guidance: The provision and consumption of food and drink in the field should be risk assessed for each field trip, taking into account factors such as the likelihood of contamination with chemical as well as biological agents, such as Weil's disease. In addition adequate means to maintain personal hygiene should be provided, such as hand washing facilities or more simply a supply of appropriate wet wipes.

Note:

“Although it may be difficult to maintain adequate food hygiene in the field, every effort should be made to do so as intestinal upsets can have a devastating effect on an expedition. Organisers should aim to provide a wholesome, balanced and varied diet. Special dietary needs must be taken into account. Local foods should be selected carefully and high risk foods avoided. Food should be stored so as to minimise risk of spoilage or contamination.

Food should be prepared in as hygienic a manner as possible and, if practicable expedition cooks should have a food hygiene qualification. People with skin, nose, throat or bowel infections should not prepare food. Preparation areas must be clean as practicable. Prepared food should be kept clean and covered. It should be cold (below 5°C) or piping hot (above 70°C).

An adequate supply of potable water must be obtained. If necessary, water should be sterilised by boiling, filtration or use of tablets. Toilets must be maintained in as clean and hygienic condition as is practicable.”

(Guidance on Safety in Fieldwork 2005: The University Safety and Health Association / Universities and Colleges Employers Association.)

7. Where a department or institution feels it is unable to implement the policy and guidance for any reason, or has any questions about its implementation.

Guidance: The department or institution should consult the University's Safety Office at the address below for further advice.



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