

CREATING A CULTURE OF SAFETY IN YOUR LAB

Advice for PIs: Setting health and safety expectations with new lab members

As a Principal Investigator/Faculty Supervisor you are responsible for the health and safety of all laboratory personnel working under your authority or within your research facilities. Because you cannot be present in your laboratory at all times, you may delegate some safety duties for which you are responsible, but you must ensure delegated duties are performed and obligations met. Early on, it is up to you to set the tone for safety for each member of your lab.

When a new lab member joins your team, it is a unique opportunity to establish that person's role in your lab's safety and success. When you lead by saying that you value a person's health and safety, you influence how he or she will approach their work, manage their space, interact with their colleagues, and respond to new information that is generated by their research.

Expect safety in your lab

To set a clear expectation, include these points in an early conversation with new lab members:

- Explicitly state that the health and safety of your lab members is *important to you* and that working safely is *the highest priority goal* of your lab.
- Mention *specific, observable* safe practices that you will expect to see, such as:
 - Wearing proper lab attire and personal protective equipment at all times
 - Maintaining an organized work space and proper storage of hazardous materials
 - Completing all required safety training courses
- Invite lab members to ask you questions and raise safety concerns at any time.
- Review high-hazard procedures, equipment, or materials used in your research.

Reinforce your message by example

Your actions can either reinforce or undermine your message! Model the behaviors that you expect to see in your lab at all times, even in circumstances when you know that the risk to you is minimal.

Here are some suggestions for what you can do to back up your message:

- Always wear your safety glasses when entering the lab to speak with your lab members.
- Use gloves and a lab coat when handling research materials or conducting demonstrations.
- Include safety as a standing agenda item for your group meetings.
- Correct any compliance issues or poor work practices immediately when you see them. This is easiest when you have previously set a clear expectation for the correct behavior.

Use EHRS as a resource

EHRS is here to help you maintain a safe and healthy research environment. Never hesitate to contact us for assistance, involve us in conversations about lab hazards, or refer your lab members to us with their questions.