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of VIRGINIA**

VPRS-001: Prohibition of Food and Drink in Research Laboratories

Date: 11/06/2008 Status: Final Policy Type: Research and Graduate Studies

Contact Office: [Environmental Health and Safety](#)

Oversight Executive: Vice President for Research

Applies To: University faculty, staff, and students.

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Reason for Policy:

Minimizes the risks of personnel being exposed to hazardous materials and assists in compliance with federal regulations, consensus health and safety guidelines, and good laboratory practices. This is in keeping with federal regulations (NRC and OSHA) as well as CDC & NIH biosafety guidelines. Each prohibits the consumption, use or storage of food and drink in the work area.

Definition of Terms in Statement:

- **Hazardous Materials:**
Agents, whether solid, liquid or gas, that can harm persons or other living organisms, property or the environment. These would include materials which are: radioactive; flammable; explosive, corrosive; toxic; or are biohazards.
- **Work Area:**
The area where work with any hazardous material could contaminate work surfaces, release airborne particles, mists or vapors or other means by which materials could spread with or without the knowledge of laboratory personnel or others in the area.

Policy Statement:

The consumption, use, or storage of food and drink in laboratories or laboratory support rooms in which chemical, biological or radioactive materials are used is prohibited.

Exceptions: When the only hazardous materials used in the laboratory are chemicals in such small quantities or of low toxicities that should not present a health hazard, the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) can evaluate the work area and, if appropriate, the area can be approved for storage and consumption of food and/or drink.

1.

Guidance Regarding Areas Used for Consumption or Storage of Food and Drink:

Consumption or storage of food and drink must occur in a room which is visually distinct from the laboratory where hazardous materials are being used. A room with floor to ceiling walls and a closeable door is preferred. However, many University laboratory facilities were not designed with separate rooms for this purpose. As a result, personnel often create separate rooms within or contiguous with the laboratory using an assortment of barriers. The following guidelines are provided to assist laboratory personnel in understanding criteria for rooms used for the consumption or storage of food and drink.

- All four room walls or barrier(s) should be at least 60 inches (152 cm) tall.
- Room barriers may be made of permanent walls, glass or plexiglass windows, partitions used in cubicle design or contiguous furniture fixed to prevent collapse. Barrier materials and orientation must prevent laboratory spills, splashes, or projection of hazardous materials into the room where food/drink is stored or consumed.

Under no circumstances may food or drink be stored in refrigerators, freezers, or temperature-controlled rooms where laboratory reagents, biological specimens, animals, or other hazardous substances currently are, will be, or have been used or stored.

Laboratory staff are encouraged to consult with EHS personnel for assistance with interpretation of these guidelines and approval of any exceptions as described above.

Procedures:

Any requests for exemption to this policy must be initiated by laboratory personnel. EHS will use criteria provided by guidelines such as the National Research Council's *Prudent Practices in the Laboratory* (National Academy Press, 1995) when evaluating requests for exemption.

Major Category: Research and Graduate Studies Policies

Approved by, Date: Vice President for Research, 11/06/2008

Revision History: This is the first version of this policy.

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