VPRS-001

Prohibition of Food and Drink in Research Laboratories

Effective Date Thursday, November 6, 2008

Status Final

Last Revised Tuesday, January 3, 2023

Policy Type Research and Graduate Studies

Contact Office
Environmental Health and Safety

Oversight Executive
Vice President for Research

Applies To
Academic Division The Medical Center The College at Wise

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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

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, biological, flammable, explosive, corrosive, or toxic.

Work Area

A work area includes, but is not limited to the following: a laboratory, laboratory support room, makerspace, shop or studio 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 personnel or others in the area.

Policy Statement

The consumption, use, or storage of food and drink by University faculty, staff, and students is prohibited in work areas where animals are handled or hazardous chemicals, biological, or radioactive materials are stored and used.

Exception: When the only hazardous materials used in the work area are chemicals that are not anticipated to present a health hazard, the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) may be asked to evaluate the work area to approve an appropriate location.

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 work area where hazardous materials are being used or stored. A room with floor to ceiling walls and a closeable door is preferred for all work areas not covered by the 'exception' above. However, many University facilities were not designed with separate rooms for this purpose. As a result, EHS personnel may assess the work area to approve an appropriate location.

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

2. **Compliance with Policy:**
   Failure to comply with the requirements of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination or expulsion in accordance with relevant University policies and may result in prosecution in accordance with state and federal law.

   Non-compliance with safety and health regulations may be subject to enforcement and penalties (OSHA 29 CFR 1910.141, 12VAC5-481-1110).

Procedures

Any requests for exemption to this policy must be initiated by the work area personnel. EHS staff will evaluate the work area, and the hazards present, to determine if a location can be safely isolated from spills, splashes, or projection of hazardous material.

Related Information

Chemical Safety: Chemical Hygiene Plan
Radiation Safety: Radiation Safety Guide

Major Category Research and Graduate Studies Policies

Next Scheduled Review Saturday, January 3, 2026

Revision History

Updated Applies To and Policy Statement 1/3/23; Deleted Radiation Safety Notebook 9/2/20; Updated 11/6/19.

Applies To Text

Academic Division, the Medical Center, the College at Wise.

Last modified February 5, 2024 - 3:11pm

Approved By Vice President for Research

Approved Date November 6, 2008 - 12:00pm