

SCHOOL of CHEMISTRY HEALTH and SAFETY COMMITTEE

Monday 7th of February Room 4.20 at 2.30pm

In Attendance

Prof J C Whitehead (Chair), Dr E M Armstrong, Mr G Smith (Minutes), Dr Robin Blagg, Dr John Morrisson, Dr N Bryan, Dr P Quayle, Mr S Holden, Mr J Hughes, Miss C Davidge, Dr D Berrisford.
Mrs C Taylor

1. Apologies

Mr J Smith, Dr T Aspinall, Prof M Anderson, Dr M Attfield

2. The minutes were passed as factually accurate however there were a number of typographical errors that needed to be amended.

3. Matters Arising

Radiation declassification of 5.07 and 5.07b. The area has now been emptied apart from the Atomic Absorption spectrometer (AA) and a preliminary survey has been undertaken by the University Radiation Safety Unit (RSU). There were some inaccessible areas in 5.07b – underneath the fume hood and under the AA bench which seem inexplicably to have been ‘boxed off’. The panels boxing off the AA bench have live electrical power sockets mounted on them which need to be isolated. It is recommended that the panels boxing off the areas are removed carefully under controlled and monitored conditions and the areas that have been contained be surveyed by the RSU. The report from the RSU will be effectively a map depicting the radioactive contaminated areas within the room. From the recent survey, some of parquet floor and some of the benching needs to be removed. Sanding the areas was offered as a possible less destructive alternative but NB was not happy with this option due to the difficulty of controlling exposure to airborne radioactive hardwood dust. JCW stated that NB should do whatever was necessary to make the room safe though he asked for an indication of the financial cost. NB replied that until the boxed off areas were investigated further it was very difficult to quantify.

JCW asked for this to be left on the agenda for the next meeting.

EMA reported that cleanliness of microwaves within the kitchens was slipping again and that if these appliances were not kept clean they would be removed from the building. NB stated that this was unfortunate as his group had cleaned them previously.

False fire alarms were still a problem. The most recent event was caused by crumbs burning in a toaster which disrupted the UCAS visit day. JCW stated that all toasters should be banned from the building. CT disagreed on the blanket ban as the admin staff kept their toaster in good order. The point was raised that as open filament heaters were unsuitable for the Chemistry building toasters are not any different. Thus persuaded, the committee decided that all toasters should be banned, with an appropriate explanation to users why this action was being taken. SH suggested that a few days notice be given before they were withdrawn to enable the toaster owners to take them home, as they are not School property. This would be auctioned ASAP.

The new lecture theatre doors were problematic as they had been locked whilst the theatres were in use, preventing some students getting to their lectures. PQ was concerned as to whether the maglocks on these doors were integrated with the fire alarm and wanted reassurance that they would open and people could get out in an emergency. EMA to follow up. *Post meeting note, reassurance has been received from the CTU that the maglocks on the theatre doors are integrated with the building fire alarm and will unlock when the fire alarm is activated. The locking during the lecture was a fault, which has been resolved.*

EMA was pleased to report that she had been successful in her application to the Deans' strategic fund for money to purchase a Karl Fisher titrator to determine the moisture content of solvents and column regeneration equipment for the solvent purification system.

Correspondence

CD informed the committee that information on the Schedule 2 chemicals under the Chemical Weapons Convention had been supplied and the University return had been sent.

EMA informed the committee that she had circulated an email to all staff requiring details of stocks and usage of Schedule 1 and 2 chemicals under the Drugs Precursors legislation. Nil returns were also required.

GDS asked if the stock of the Class 1 Scheduled chemicals had now been centralised. EMA stated that once all the returns re scheduled chemicals were received she would know from where the existing stocks needed to be collected and managed.

EPS faculty accident statistics had been issued to heads of School. JCW was shocked by the extent to which Chemistry contributed to these statistics when compared to other Schools. This trend was also observed for RIDDOR reportable accidents.

JCW asked for GDS to write to the teaching committee and Karen Charters to ask them to consider why the accident levels to undergraduate students had gone up in the 2010 calendar year and what could be done to reverse this trend. He would like a response by 11th April. GDS asked whether the figures are an accurate representation of the facts or whether in Chemistry there was a better reporting culture. JCW opined that they were accurate. PQ requested the information be circulated separately to the six members of academic staff who coordinate the laboratory courses. DB queried the laboratory in which most accidents had occurred and was told that the Measurement laboratory had made a high contribution this year.

PQ asked how our accident statistics compared with those from Biological Sciences but CD replied that she did not have any figures at the moment.

4. Chairman's Business

JCW informed the committee that the management committee had looked at the non-compliance policy that had been introduced in the MIB and felt, in the light of recent events, that it needed to be amended to align more closely with the University's disciplinary procedures before a similar policy was introduced in the School. TA in MIB was working on this.

JCW informed the committee about the forthcoming HASMAP – Health and Safety Management and Profile - audit. This is a rolling audit process that will be carried by the central University Health and Safety Services over the next five years. Each year an audit will be carried out examining different areas of health and safety. The audit this year will examine the perception of Safety. All levels of staff will be involved from the Dean down. As part of the audit a number of interviews with all levels of staff will be carried out in the Chemistry building during March.

As a consequence of the audit, an action plan will be developed to improve health and safety in the School so it will be a valuable exercise which will help to determine priorities. JCW asked if paperwork would be examined as part of the audit and was told it would be.

SH commented that there is a lot of information available on the School website but there were concerns that this was not consulted and followed in some instances. He also queried whether health and safety matters were addressed in many research group meetings. PQ replied he certainly mentioned this on a regular basis with his group.

5. Latest accidents/incidents

EMA informed the committee of a number of accidents and incidents that have happened since the last health and safety meeting.

There were two injuries to undergraduate students, neither requiring hospital treatment – a cut finger and a sulfuric acid burn on a hand.

Lastly, a student cut her hand on a broken glass vial. This required stitches and was RIDDOR reportable.

Following the accidents in the measurement laboratory, where there are currently no first aiders, the new technician Delroy Flemmings, and Jonathan Agger have expressed interest in being trained up.

There was a fire in one of the research laboratories caused by inappropriate use of a rotary evaporator. Ether was being boiled off at 40°C on a buchi without a vacuum. The flask dropped into heated water bath igniting the ether. A post-doc attempted to put the fire out by placing a wet lab coat on top of the water bath. This did not work and the fire was subsequently put out by a technician using a fire extinguisher. Half of the bench was damaged as a result of the fire.

EMA went on to inform the committee that the buchi was exhausted correctly and that the student involved was a third year post-graduate. CD asked how this incident was to be taken forward. EMA replied that rotary evaporator sample surveys would be carried out and a general email would be sent out to remind researchers about the correct use of rotary evaporators. SH stated that if the researcher had followed a suitable risk assessment this incident would not have happened. EMA stated that the use of rotary evaporators was covered in the generic risk assessment for laboratory activities. SH then asked if a single induction session for researchers was adequate. EMA said that as a result of similar concerns, this year's induction sessions had been expanded and were spread over 5 sessions. JCW suggested that refresher training would be appropriate. RB suggested that in addition to the annual reports that are required for postgraduates to progress to the next year of study, that attendance at refresher training be mandatory.

6. Latest near misses

On 27th December there was a flood in the room next door to the isotope store. A contractor from Estates stopped the leak and checked that there was no damage in the isotope store after obtaining a key from Chemistry Reception, which activated the intruder alarm. NB informed the committee that he was not aware that the porters had a key to the isotope stores and following this incident emergency contact and emergency key lists have been given to Reception. Worryingly, the activation of the intruder alarm had not been transmitted to the main Security Lodge and the activated strobe light outside the isotope store was not noted until 2nd January by Security. The fault was reported on 4th January. *Post meeting note - this has now been attended to.*

RB reported that a drying tube containing Calcium Chloride used on the house nitrogen had become over pressurised and exploded inside a fume cupboard. No one was hurt. Since the accident all but two of these drying tubes have been removed from the lab.

7. Fire Safety access and egress

GDS spoke about the document he had produced highlighting concerns about flammable rubbish on fire exit routes from the building. EMA stated that there were some good ideas within the document and that she had used it during a meeting with Estates to highlight abandoned contractors debris. Nothing further was decided regarding an inspection regime.

8. Unreclaimed NMR tubes

CW stated that he did not feel this was an appropriate issue for the safety committee to debate and that the service manager has sufficient authority to deal with the issue in whichever way he saw fit. GS and EMA expressed their strong opinion it was a safety issue as tubes were often inadequately labelled but welcomed the clarification of support to the service manager to resolve the situation. GS went on to mention during his time in NMR he had an issue with someone placing Dimethyl mercury samples in a rack along side normal samples. If these had become broken or were cleaned like a normal sample there would have been a serious safety issue.

9. MIB update

DB informed the committee that a new compliance document was being produced. A refresher course would also be taking place every two years for all PI's. There were no accidents recorded.

10. Latest inspections

EMA informed the committee that three inspections had been carried out, and two of the reports had been circulated. The third would be circulated shortly (3rd floor Dover Street). Generally housekeeping was the main problem throughout the laboratories inspected. All three areas will be re-inspected in the forthcoming weeks to observe if the safety issues raised have been addressed.

Next inspections.

5 th Floor Upper Brook Street	Date to be arranged
5 th Floor Dover Street	Date to be arranged
4 th Floor Upper Brook Street	Date to be arranged
6 th Floor	Date to be arranged

A number of people volunteered to undertake the safety inspections.

CD, CW, GDS, NB, JM, JH, SH, EMA

SH suggested that for the 6th floor inspection a member of the Electronics workshop be present due to the floor having large quantities of complex electronic equipment

11. AOB

JH raised the ongoing issue of legacy samples. During a laboratory tidy up he had found a number of cadmium samples. If the sample could be identified with a PI then s/he would have to pay for cleanup and disposal costs. However if the materials are not attributable, clear up costs have to be met from School budgets, which are already stretched.

After much discussion it was concluded that this was a problem that the committee did not have a solution for at this time. JCW suggested that the Postgraduate committee and Research committee should be asked for some input regarding this problem. GDS will write to the two committees.

Date of next meeting: 2pm on the 11th of April.

The meeting finished at 16.25