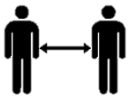
UCI Environmental Health & Safety

Working Alone Safely
REFERENCE GUIDE

Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) recommends avoiding working alone or in isolated areas. Working alone with hazardous materials, equipment or otherwise working under conditions that may create the risk of serious injury should be avoided. If a researcher must work alone, EH&S recommends notifying your PI or supervisor and following these guidelines:

Buddy System

EH&S recommends that all hazardous laboratory work be conducted with a buddy system (partner or co-worker or in proximity to others) in the event of an emergency. There are several methods to implement a buddy system while working alone including:



Physical In-Person Buddy: Recommended for higher-risk tasks such as handling hazardous chemicals. Personnel should be in the local area within earshot and know your location.

Close-proximity Buddy: If there are other personnel in the building conducting critical tasks, coordinate schedules to serve as one another's buddy. Check-in on one another's areas regularly (e.g., every 30 minutes) to ensure safety.

Live Remote Buddy: By using video conferencing tools or conducting phone calls, a remote buddy can be available to check on the status of the in-person buddy and act in the event of an emergency, but not be physically present.

It is always recommended to check-in with the PI or supervisor or another researcher. For lower-risk tasks such as splitting non-hazardous cells, checking on animals in the vivarium, cleaning and maintenance activities in laboratories, periodic check-ins are appropriate.

Tell your buddy where you are/will be working (building and room), when to expect a check-in, and the plan if you do not check-in at the appointed time (e.g., call you, or appropriate authority such as the PI).

Working Alone Safely Guidelines

Avoid working alone, especially after hours, whenever possible. Discuss the planned work with the PI/supervisor if you are a researcher who works/intends to work in potentially hazardous environments (e.g., laboratories, machine shops, etc.) and with hazardous equipment or materials that may result in immediate injury or serious harm. Discuss how the work will be conducted and determine that the risk of working alone is controllable under the specific conditions established by the PI or supervisor for the scope of work to be performed.

If a researcher must work alone to perform critical tasks, EH&S recommends that researchers follow these steps to ensure appropriate safety measures:

1) Notify **PI or supervisor of date(s) and time(s)** the work will be conducted (during regular business hours versus at night or on weekends/holidays) and check-ins as appropriate. Let the PI or supervisor know if you be working alone or after regular building hours.

2) Perform a **Hazard Assessment** with the PI or supervisor, and including these elements:
    a. Tasks and hazards involved in the work

b. Required personal protective equipment (PPE) to reduce the likelihood of injury
c. Consequences resulting from the worst-case scenario
d. Written standard operating procedures (SOP) identifying safety controls and PPE

It is recommended that individuals have the appropriate level of experience and have completed required safety training to safely conduct tasks and activities.

3) Be familiar with **UCI Emergency Preparedness and Response** procedures
   a. Identify the nearest emergency eyewash/safety shower
   b. Know where the emergency exits are located and the emergency assembly area for the building
   c. Enroll in the emergency alert system www.police.uci.edu/em/zotalert.htm
   d. In the event of an emergency, ensure there is direct access to a phone at all times
   e. **Call UCI PD at 9-1-1 in the event of a serious or life-threatening emergency**

Additional PI or Supervisor Considerations

Each circumstance will be different, but it is recommended that PI or supervisors consider the length of time, communication strategies, surroundings, experience/competency of personnel and the nature of the work when permitting personnel to work alone.

Table 1: Recommended Supervisor Guidelines for Working Alone*

Type of Supervision	Qualified Supervision at all times	Someone present in the lab	Working Alone Permitted with PI or Supervisors' Approval
Personnel	Minors (e.g., High schools, students, etc.) Visitors	Undergraduate Students First-Year Graduate Students	Graduate Students Postdoctoral Fellows Ph.D./Medical Research Scientists Technicians
Reason	No lab experience Legal requirement for minors	Limited lab experience Limited experience in emergencies	Procedure requiring assistance based on SOP or protocol requirements Experienced in lab-specific and emergency procedures

**Guidelines are based on UCI campus Visitors and minors in labs and shops policy*

Examples of tasks that EHS recommends to **NEVER BE CONDUCTED ALONE**:

- Work with highly hazardous materials (e.g., pyrophorics, water-reactive/highly chemicals, strong oxidizers, regulated carcinogens, potentially explosive chemicals, etc.)
- Procedures involving high or low pressure
- Procedures involving entering confined spaces or working from elevated heights
- Use of powered shop equipment, high voltage (>600V) equipment, or industrial or highly-pressured equipment
- Tasks that have current policies or procedures that require staff does not work alone

Contact **EH&S at (949) 824-6200 or safety@uci.edu** for assistance in creating hazard assessments or questions on this reference guide document.

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I have reviewed and understand the contents of this document.

Name (print)	UCInetID	Signature	Date