Virtual Buddy System and Laboratory Safety. V2

March 17, 2020

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Each PI should create a plan that will ensure the safety for all critical personnel entering laboratories. These plans should be appropriate for the approved critical activity while considering the hazard potential within the laboratory. Principal Investigators remain responsible for the safety and training of their personnel during the crisis and shall ensure that the laboratory environment is safe.

Access to labs for essential functions must conform to laboratory safety expectations. However, having two people travel for tasks that can be done by one person is not in the public interest. We will allow single individuals to perform essential laboratory functions IF they establish an open telephone line, Facetime, or equivalent verbal real-time connection, with a “virtual buddy” for the period between building entry and building exit. For cases where phone connectivity is not assured within buildings, participants are expected to use the University’s wireless system to establish this link. If, and only if, neither of these are viable then off-line interruptions of no longer than 10 minutes are permissible. Set a timer!

The person entering the building needs to provide building and room number to their virtual buddy, as a written text message, ahead of time. The virtual buddy must confirm receipt. The external “virtual buddy” is responsible for monitoring the well-being of the person in the building, giving that task their full attention.

A period exceeding 15 minutes of no communication requires calling 911, providing the building, room number, and name of person in the lab.

Individuals must follow use personal protective equipment as defined in their PPE Assessment for the activity or location. Face protection and cryogenic gloves are mandatory when changing Liquid Nitrogen dewars. LN2 dewar changes may follow virtual buddy system. However, if personnel need to draw LN2 from a dewar, they should have a buddy.

No hazardous chemicals can be used by single individuals.

During this period of restricted access, the use of any powered tools is expressly forbidden.

Ensure that all gas bottles are restrained at both the top and the bottom of the cylinder.

It is essential that individuals entering Harvard buildings pay careful attention to surface hygiene issues. Individuals shall not come on campus if they are symptomatic or under self-isolation/quarantine. Designated personnel entering the laboratory will maintain appropriate social distancing (2 meter separation) and observe all appropriate personal hygiene practices.

Laboratory activities are restricted to pre-approved essential tasks.

The policy outlined here was approved by William VanSchalkwyk, Managing Director for Environmental Health and Safety, on March 17, 2020.