

SAFETY WAVE

OEHS Welcomes Back the Tulane Community

OEHS would like to take this opportunity to welcome back the Tulane community. Because of damage caused by Hurricane Katrina on most of Tulane's campuses, OEHS staff members have been busy since early October inspecting buildings and working with Facilities Services, Belfor, and RMCAT to make sure Tulane buildings were safe for re-occupancy. OEHS has been in almost every room in every building, power or no power, climbing stairs, carrying flashlights, wearing hard hats and personal protective equipment, searching the entire University for safety hazards lurking in hallways and behind every door. Hazards ranged from broken or missing glass windows to slip/trip hazards to mold to asbestos to chemical spills to leaking biohazard refrigerators. As we searched, we constantly heard the pleas of the Tulane community: "Please hurry!" "We need to get back!" "We need to reopen!" "We need our research materials!" "We need our files!" "We need our computers!" OEHS has witnessed the rebirth of this great University, going from a virtually isolated community where food had to be shipped in just to feed the handful of working University employees to the campuses today thriving with researchers, educators, and students. It is amazing that we have come so far in such a short time. None of this would have been possible without the encouragement and planning of a dynamic administration, the dedication of a great Facilities Services staff, and the assistance from our outside contractors who have worked relentlessly to supply emergency power and air to buildings, to remove mold, to clean and pick up waste chemicals and biologicals, and do anything they could to make the come-back process happen.



Now that most of us are back, we need to ensure we start off on the right foot. Safety must be a top priority. Who knows better the importance of planning for emergencies than the Tulane community and city of New Orleans? Who knows better the importance of being prepared? Who knows better the extreme importance of reliable communication, transportation, electricity, shelter, water, and food? We need to take what we experienced and learn from it. When we see hazards, we need to report and correct them. We need to establish contact information for those in our department, to include not just home phone numbers but also alternate emails, cell numbers, or evacuation destinations. We need to heed all safety warnings - whether to evacuate the city in a hurricane or leave the building when we hear the fire alarm. We need to be aware of our surroundings and take action when it is needed. We need to anticipate what might happen and be ready.

Many changes are occurring all around us and we all must change to meet the new challenges of our altered environment. OEHS is still here to provide the support for a healthy and safe environment for our research, medical care, and teaching missions. Let's redouble our efforts to plan for emergencies in our particular areas. Remember, the next hurricane season starts June 1st but other emergencies may occur at any time. Are you ready?

You should be aware that since Katrina the University has been visited by several federal and state regulatory officials. We did not receive any violations because our employees and the contractors were performing their duties in a safe and healthful manner in accordance with safety and health laws and regulations. Congratulations! We're glad you're back.

SafetyWave Goes Paperless

As of this issue, OEHS will now be supplying the SafetyWave electronically to the Tulane community. The newsletter will still be published quarterly and there will be a special holiday edition.

We still are offering space in the SafetyWave for short articles or tidbits of information from faculty and staff about safety and health issues of interest to our University community. If there are "lessons learned" related to safety and environmental health, please share them with your co-workers by sending OEHS your information. We look forward to reading about your "lessons learned" and sharing your experiences.

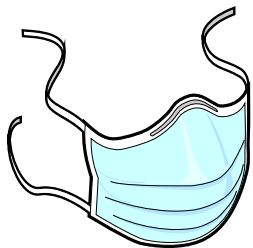
Chemical Inventory Reports

One of the major tools available to emergency personnel during Hurricane Katrina was the Chemical Inventory, a detailed listing according to room and building of all chemicals stored and used at Tulane on all campuses. This master listing is compiled annually by OEHS based upon the inventory reports that are received from personnel in charge of areas where chemicals are used or stored, such as research and teaching labs, Facilities Services, Printing, Art, Student Health, etc. In the event of an emergency, such as a major hurricane or fire, it is essential for emergency responders to have knowledge of the various potential hazards present upon entering any of the campus buildings and individual rooms. Knowledge of these hazards allows responders to select the proper personal protective equipment and extinguishing media to use in the various areas on campus. It also permits responders to attend more effectively to personnel who may have been exposed to chemicals in those areas.

The need to submit chemical inventories annually to OEHS is not only a Tulane requirement but is also required by state and federal regulations under the Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act (EPCRA) of 1986. This Act was passed in response to concerns about safety and environmental hazards posed by stored chemicals and as a result of the release of methyl isocyanate in Bhopal, India in 1984 where 2,000 people were either killed or seriously injured. Tulane and other facilities nationwide are required under EPCRA to report annually to the State Police, the Local Emergency Planning Committee, and the local Fire Department all chemicals exceeding certain threshold amounts.

In order for the University to fulfill its reporting requirements under federal, state, and local law, OEHS must know which chemicals are present on campus. It is essential that all departments annually submit an updated Chemical Inventory to OEHS so that the University may compile the master inventory listing and report to the regulatory authorities. These inventories were used to warn emergency personnel and contractors of the location of hazardous chemicals at the beginning of the post-Katrina clean-up and restoration process. (On a similar note, OEHS radiation safety personnel managed to locate and secure radioactive materials and sources from all campuses. These will be returned to their proper owners once the areas are ready for their use.)

For more information on the Chemical Inventory report, contact Pam Fatland, (504)988-2800 or pfatlan@tulane.edu.



Surgical Masks ≠ Respirators

Who would have thought the general public would become so well versed in personal protective equipment? The issue of respiratory protection is surprisingly complex and normally designations like “N-95 respirators” are familiar mostly to safety professionals and workers in certain jobs. But since Katrina, many people have had a need to learn more about personal protective equipment. N-95 respirators have been widely recommended as the minimum level of respiratory protection for working in flooded homes. You may have noticed that these N-95 respirators look a lot like surgical masks but they are not necessarily the same thing.

The purpose of a surgical mask is to filter air expelled by the wearer (i.e., protect the patient from germs exhaled by the medical provider) whereas a respirator is designed to protect the wearer from airborne particles in the ambient air. Respirators are certified by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and tests are done to evaluate the performance or collection efficiency of the filter. For example, an N-95 respirator has been tested and certified to be 95% efficient at removing airborne particles that are 0.3 microns in diameter.

Due to concerns about exposures of healthcare workers to patients with TB and SARS, *some* surgical masks have also been tested and certified by NIOSH as N-95 respirators.

The moral of this story is that surgical masks and respirators are not necessarily the same thing and they are not interchangeable. Surgical masks should not be used as respirators (unless they have been tested and certified by NIOSH). If you don't see an N-95 designation, you are probably using a surgical mask - not a respirator.

Don't forget that a respirator needs to fit properly in order to work well. Beards adversely affect the facial seal and persons with small faces may need to obtain smaller size respirators. Also note that N-95 respirators only filter out particles; they will not protect you from noxious odors or chemical vapors.

What's That Smell? Odors from Dry Sinks and Floor Drains

Is your lab or work area plagued by sporadic or worsening odors? There are lots of reasons why odor complaints occur. Sometimes odors migrate from labs where volatile or noxious chemicals are being handled outside of a hood. Sometimes it's because of a burned out fluorescent light fixture (ballast) or maybe it's because diesel fumes from idling vehicles or generators found their way into the building's air intakes. Sometimes we never find out what is causing the problem.



One frequent cause of odor complaints is related to dry sinks and floor drains. If you've ever looked under a sink drain, you'll see a sideways P-shaped piece of pipe under there. This "P-trap" is designed to hold a small amount of water in the pipe which prevents sewer gases from coming back into the building. If the sink or floor drain is not used very often (especially in some of the older buildings), the P-trap can dry out and this allows a fairly distinctive sewer gas odor to come into the building. This situation is exasperated when noxious materials are poured down the drains against University policy and environmental regulations, and odors rise from the P-traps in offices and labs where others are exposed to these hazardous gases.

Since the University was closed for several months after Katrina, P-traps in some sinks and floor drains may have dried out. You are urged to put a small amount of water into any sinks or floor drains in your work area. Don't forget the small cup sinks in fume hoods or on lab countertops. We'd mention the eyewash stations too but we know you are testing those on a weekly basis...right?

Departmental Safety Representatives (DSRs)

I am sure many of you have noted changes in departments, colleges, and areas on the campuses. There are several new faces together with our returning staff. It is for this reason that we need your assistance in getting the DSR program back on track. We have not had a DSR meeting since Hurricane Katrina struck on August 29, 2005. We need each chair, director, and department head to verify who their designated DSR is. If there has or has not been a change, then we need to know this. Please provide OEHS with the following information: name of DSR, their telephone number, their email address, and category of the area they represent (Office, Laboratory, or Facilities). Remember, "Office" means no chemicals are used in the area represented; "Facilities" means that some chemicals may be used but there are no labs in the area represented; and "Laboratory" means that laboratories are included in the area represented. Also, give us the name of your campus and department as well. This information should be sent to Louis Mayer, Manager - Training, Education, and General Safety in OEHS at lmayer@tulane.edu. If you have any questions, then please call him at (504)988-2447. With this information OEHS will develop a database so that information such as meeting notices, training material, safety notices, etc. can be sent to the DSRs. Also, we will soon begin scheduling the quarterly DSR meetings for 2006. The first meeting will include topics such as DSR Expectations to educate our new staff on this program and to serve as a refresher for our returning personnel. We are looking forward to presenting an exciting program for 2006.

Unwanted Chemicals?



Now that Hurricane Katrina is over, everyone on campus should either be in the process of or should have completed the evaluation of their losses including equipment; chemical, biological, or radioactive materials; and researcher-derived products. Unwanted materials or those no longer useful to you should be properly discarded. Contact Bruce McClue, Hazardous Waste Supervisor, at (504)988-2865 or email him at bmccclue@tulane.edu if you still have chemicals that need to be removed. Charles Reindl of OEHS is available for radioactive material disposal, (504)988-2867.

If there are laboratories in your department where researchers have not returned, it is essential that these areas also be evaluated for losses and hazardous material disposal needs. Ultimately the department chair or director should appoint a knowledgeable person in the department to go through the laboratory to determine if any hazardous materials are present, if the hazardous materials need to be kept or if they can be disposed, and essentially make sure that the materials are disposed of properly or re-appropriated to others in the department who may be able to use them. The lab then needs to be decontaminated, cleaned, and left in a safe condition. OEHS will work with the departments as needed to make sure these areas are identified and are not "abandoned." The fewer hazardous materials left around that are not being used, the safer the University will be. For more information, please see the Laboratory Closeout Policy in the Laboratory Safety Section (Section 30) of the OEHS Policies and Procedures Manual.

New Bloodborne Pathogens Coordinator

OEHS would like to welcome Kellie Mayer as our new Bloodborne Pathogens Coordinator. Remember, if you perform tasks or procedures in your job where there is the potential for occupational exposure to bloodborne pathogens or other potentially infectious materials, OSHA mandates that you must receive initial and annual training on bloodborne pathogens, including hepatitis B virus (HBV), human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and hepatitis C virus (HCV). Initial training needs to be done in person, but annual training can be completed online for your convenience at <http://blackborard.tulane.edu>. If you have been notified that you are due for training, please complete it as soon as possible. To be added as a student in the online course, to schedule training to be presented in-person for your group, or if you experience a needlestick or splash of potentially infectious materials, please contact Kellie at (504)988-6608 or email her at kmayer@tulane.edu.

New Manager of Training, Education, and General Safety

OEHS would like to welcome back Louis Mayer to the department. Louis is returning after a few years as Director of Emergency Preparedness. He will now manage safety training and recordkeeping, the Departmental Safety Representative program, Emergency Action Plans, general safety, and a myriad of other activities including fire safety, his absolute favorite. Louis can be reached at (504)988-2447 or email lmayer@tulane.edu.

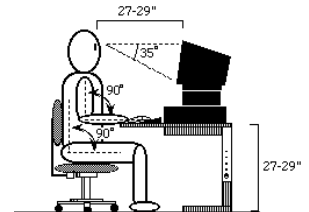
Laser Producing Equipment

OEHS Manager of Occupational Safety, Susan Welch, recently assumed responsibility as the University's Laser Safety Officer. The LSO's duties include approving purchases of new lasers/laser systems, approving Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Class 3b and Class 4 laser systems, periodically inspecting laser systems and hazard control measures, and recommending personal protective equipment and other laser control measures. OEHS is currently updating the list of registered lasers and laser systems at Tulane. If you have a laser system in your work area, please complete the Laser Registration form (found on OEHS website) and submit it to Susan at swelch@tulane.edu.

Ergonomics

When replacing obsolete and/or damaged office furniture or equipment, consider purchasing ergonomically correct furniture/equipment. The following ergonomic web sites may assist you with your selection:

1. OSHA: <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations/index.html>
2. ErgoWeb: <http://ergobuyer.com/ergobuyer/>
3. 3M's Ergonomic: <http://www.3m.com/ergonomics/index.jhtml>
4. Cornell University Ergonomic: <http://ergo.human.cornell.edu/>



Should you need further ergonomic assistance, please call Mitzi Hithe, Env. Health & Safety Specialist for assistance at (504)988-2866.

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Environmental Health & Safety

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