

Safety Alert – June 2022

Subject: Chemicals and Samples Travelled Outside Labs to Office Desks

UNSW Safety is issuing a Safety Alert to remind staff, students and that chemicals are to be stored appropriately stored in laboratories and not in offices. The storage of chemicals on an office desk can result in chemical exposures, uncontrolled spills or food contamination, and can lead to injury, illness or death.

Background

During a safety walkthrough, a small container of a hazardous substance, was spotted unattended on a desk outside a laboratory in an open office workspace. The chemical was found to be lithium nitrate which is an oxidising solid that can cause acute toxicity (oral) and serious eye damage/irritation. Several additional non-hazardous chemical samples and food items were located on the desk, and a number of boxes of unknown chemicals were located under the desk.

While no apparent injury/damage was identified at the time of the finding, the hazards associated with this situation may have led to chemical exposure, and associated health implications, as well as property damage as a result of a spill or fire.

Actions Taken

- The Area Supervisor and Laboratory Manager were notified of the situation
- Chemicals and samples were collected in chemical transporting buckets and relocated to the relevant laboratory
- Chemical details were added to the laboratory's chemical register and updated within Jaggaer
- Samples were assessed for hazards and risks and relocated to the correct dangerous goods cabinets
- Food items located on the desk were discarded
- Area users to be encouraged to speak with their Area Supervisor, Laboratory Manager or Safety Advisor for further guidance on hazardous chemicals and other workplace hazards

Further Information:
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