

## Odors with unknown source

Odors with unknown sources can be an occasional source of irritation and disruption on campus near research buildings.

Leave the area if the odor:

- Causes acute symptoms of chemical exposure e.g. irritation, coughing, headaches dizziness etc. or
- Has the characteristic natural gas odor.

### BACKGROUND

Noxious odors smell bad. Natural gas also smells bad. Sometimes individuals, who smell something bad, call 911 and report a natural gas smell. These reports are treated as possible natural gas leaks and buildings are evacuated until it is verified that the source is not natural gas. This interrupts research and classes.

### COMMON SOURCES OF ODORS

- ✓ Insufficiently closed gas valves
- ✓ Improper handling of noxious chemicals
- ✓ Empty or dry traps to floor drains, & cup sinks
- ✓ Containers in need of change
  - Waste: glass, trash, bio-hazard waste bins
  - "forgotten" lunches, snacks & beverages.

### Office workers

Report the odor to Facilities Management 4-2900. Leave the area if necessary, otherwise, check list of common sources(above) for any that apply to your area and notify nearby labs or your building manager, if applicable. If the irritating smell of unknown source reoccurs, start a log of days and times. Reoccurring odors will be investigated and logs help to identify sources.

### Lab workers who smell something or hear of odor complaints

**\*REPORT Improper handling of noxious chemicals ASAP** (see Reminders for Proper Handling)\*

- Notify DEHS 6-6002. By notifying ASAP we can avoid a building evacuation
1. Ask if anyone was recently using an odorous material
  2. Check common sources. Check gas valves first.
  3. Fill all sinks and floor drains with water to eliminate dry traps as potential sources.  
drains (anti-freeze may be used to keep the trap full longer)
  4. Check all tubing, hoses, connections & trays for any possible cracks, or inadvertent leaks
  5. Verify stench chemical containers are fully closed (consider storing these in a vented cabinet or inside another container with an odor absorbing material)

**REMEMBER-** Do not rely on your nose to determine if materials are properly sealed or decontaminated. Olfactory glands quickly become de-sensitized to smells. If you no longer smell a compound, it does not mean that the smell is gone or the material decontaminated.

6. Clean any dirty dishes and lab ware.
7. Change all the waste containers, including: hazardous, biohazardous, trash, recycling and broken glass boxes.
8. Look in drawers and backpacks for forgotten lunches, snacks and beverages
9. **Then report the odor (and hopefully identified source) to your supervisor. Also notify facilities management and DEHS 6-6002 if it was smelled outside of your lab.**

### Odor Prevention

- Regularly clean out drawers and cabinets to check for spoiled foods.
- Contact facilities if custodial service is inadequate.
- Regularly pour water down any sinks or other drains in your area.
- Lab workers should regularly review the checks for noxious chemicals

### Checks for Proper HANDLING and STORAGE of Noxious Chemicals

(See the stench chemical fact sheet [http://www.dehs.umn.edu/PDFs/Stench\\_Chemicals.pdf](http://www.dehs.umn.edu/PDFs/Stench_Chemicals.pdf) for more specific guidance)

#### Storage

- well sealed- free from damage, cracks, tightly closed with compatible cap and container
- May require ventilated storage area, additional seals or odor absorbents.

- These should only be opened in a fume hood. DO NOT open on the bench top.** Wipe down container sides with a deodorizing agent (e.g.bleach, sodium bicarb) if compatible before removing from the hood and returning to storage.

- Provide excess neutralizer & absorbent for removing or scrubbing odors**

#### Contaminated labware (gloves, vials, tips etc)

- Sufficiently decontaminate before placing in regular trash or glass waste
- Or dispose of as hazardous waste in a well-sealed container