



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

## **Texas Tech Embraces National Academies Report on Laboratory Safety**

By: M. Duane Nellis, President; Lawrence Schovanec, Provost and Senior Vice President; Robert V. Duncan, Vice President for Research

The National Academies of Science/National Research Council (NAS/NRC) report on Safe Science: Promoting a Culture of Safety in Academic Chemical Research was released July 31. See the NAS/NRC news release and [full report here](#).

Texas Tech University embraces a key finding of the National Academies report, namely that to safeguard the welfare of students, staff and faculty, our academic leaders must establish expectations and support systems that reinforce a strong safety culture and enable strong scholarship, teaching and service.

At Texas Tech, we recognize that all our laboratories, studios and research sites are affected by the organizational and interpersonal factors outlined in this report. While the report may focus on chemistry laboratories, there are lessons to be learned about safety culture and behaviors for any research space. Our ongoing work to strengthen and improve the safety culture at Texas Tech focuses on the factors highlighted in the report—our organizational and reporting structures, our evaluation criteria, and the workload and workplace pressures encountered by our students, staff and faculty.

Our revised Chemical Hygiene Plan (CHP) identifies some of the key activities of a strong safety culture noted in the NAS/NRC report.

- One is faculty leadership to identify hazards—especially those that accompany new areas of research and creative activity—and develop proactive safety plans and active student learning experiences that mitigate any risks.
- A second is the key role played by college and departmental safety officers, appointed by deans and chairs and given authority and resources to respond quickly and responsively to local needs. Our CHP is actively managed by a faculty-led safety committee and supported by academic, Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S), and operations division leaders who ask that all members of their units who work in or near areas that may contain hazards read and use the CHP.
- Finally, the NAS/NRC report highlights a topic that hasn't often been discussed about safety in academic laboratories—the 'soft' or management skills that our faculty need to lead safe labs and studios. Texas Tech has long-running new faculty orientations and tenure academies—and now we have national guidance to expand these to support Texas Tech faculty and, through their efforts, our students in their safe pursuits of their academic and research activities.

The university began taking aggressive steps toward elevating our safety culture following a 2010 incident in a chemistry laboratory. Our response to that incident continues to receive close scrutiny from our Administration, our Board of Regents, and the Chemical Safety Board.

The Office of the Vice President for Research, supported by the Office of the President and the Office of the Provost, has made a commitment to laboratory safety and to open and transparent discussions of the issues with everyone in our academic community and beyond. We are taking many steps to make Texas Tech a model institution for lab, studio and other research site safety, including upgrading the EH&S director to an assistant vice president for research position. Simply stated, safety is an integral part of all our activities at Texas Tech.

If you have questions or comments, please contact Alice Young at [alice.young@ttu.edu](mailto:alice.young@ttu.edu).