



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
Office of the Provost

February 9th, 2009

To: The Texas Tech University Research Community

From: Dr. Bob Smith, Provost and Senior Vice President ^{BS}
Dr. Taylor Eighmy, Vice President for Research _{TE}

Cc: Dr. Guy Bailey, President
Corky Dragoo, Senior Vice President for Administration and Finance and Chief Operating Officer
Ron Philips, University Counsel
Dr. Alice Young, Faculty Fellow for Research Integrity, OVPR
Randy Nix, Executive Director of TTU Environmental Health and Safety
Dr. Jon Strauss, Interim Dean of WCOE
Dr. Lawrence Schovanec, Interim Dean of CAS
Dr. John Burns, Dean of CASNR
Dr. Linda Hoover, Dean of COHS

Re: Laboratory Safety

As many of you know, a serious laboratory accident occurred at Texas Tech University on January 7th. A doctoral candidate in the Chemistry and Biochemistry Department was badly injured when an explosion occurred in the laboratory. We are extremely fortunate that a fatality did not occur. The student is slowly recovering from serious injuries, and we extend our best wishes to the student and his family for continued recovery and a return to health. Texas Tech University is completing its investigation. The U.S. Chemical Safety Board (<http://www.csb.gov/>) and the federal sponsor of the research, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, have begun investigations of the accident as well. We are cooperating fully and transparently and expect these investigations to inform us as to possible improvements in our practices, procedures, and policies. The U.S. Chemical Safety Board investigation (<http://www.csb.gov/newsroom/detail.aspx?nid=301>) will be exhaustive; they have elected to use this accident as a means to address their concerns nationally around laboratory safety in higher education.

We would like to use this current situation to begin a campus dialogue around laboratory safety awareness among faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduates working in laboratories. We also will use this unfortunate accident to make sure that all personnel involved with laboratory work are made aware of the online safety training offered by TTU Environmental Health and Safety (EHS), the relevant Operating Policies associated with laboratory and chemical safety, and the availability of in-person training offered by EHS staff for labs and departments.

Specifically, we ask the four Deans designated in this memo to work with their Department Chairs and all direct or affiliated Center and Institute Directors involved with research and education involving laboratories to certify the following:

1. All personnel (faculty, staff, graduate students, undergraduates) working in or using laboratories (including those used for instruction) have taken the appropriate online laboratory safety training module (<http://ehs-server.ehs.ttu.edu/Web/TrainModDesc.aspx>). Randy Nix and his staff are available to recommend the relevant modules for classroom laboratory instruction or research laboratory activity and to assist the Deans generally with this request.
2. All faculty and staff supervising personnel in any laboratories use this situation to discuss with their classes or groups general laboratory safety principles and the importance and awareness of safety and the necessary compliance with safety practices.
3. All departments and laboratories that presently have their own laboratory safety practices and procedures should update them as necessary and then discuss them in light of the current situation with all relevant personnel. Randy Nix and his staff welcome the opportunity to assist departments and laboratories who do not yet have such plans and would like to develop them.

Additionally, a working group has been established by us to completely reexamine how we manage laboratory safety, the culture of safety awareness, and safety training compliance. The group presently includes Ron Phillips, Randy Nix and Dr. Alice Young. We are asking Dr. Young to lead this reexamination effort; she will be inviting additional members from across the community to participate. This effort will happen in parallel with and be informed by the U.S. Chemical Safety Board investigation. The effort will include looking at best practices at peer institutions and perhaps involve outside expert consultation. We envision that practices and procedures may be changed or potentially improved and that operating policies may be modified or developed. Further, we anticipate that this focus on laboratory safety will also become incorporated as a key element of our "responsible conduct of research" training program being developed by Dr. Young within the Office of the Vice President for Research.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact either of us.

We appreciate your attention and we look forward to your continued collaboration as we move forward.