COVID Conditions Increase Need to Work Safely

As we prepare to return to campus, the Environmental Health & Safety Office would like to take a moment to remind everyone to practice safety. Don’t learn it by accident!

Whether you are going into campus or working from home, the COVID-19 pandemic has probably changed the way you work. Employees providing essential services to the campus community have been especially stretched thin, working longer hours than usual, and working more shifts, leaving less time to sleep and recharge.

Fatigue can increase the risk for injury and deteriorating health. Pay close attention to yourself and your coworkers for signs of fatigue—like yawning, difficulty keeping eyes open, and difficulty concentrating. When you see something, say something to your coworkers so you can prevent workplace injuries and errors. Do not work if your fatigue threatens the safety of yourself or others. Report to a manager when you feel too tired to work safely.

Supervisors should recognize that these are stressful and unusual circumstances and risk and fatigue may be increased. We encourage supervisors to regularly schedule breaks for their employees in clean and safe areas where social distancing can be maintained. There may be a need for additional time for increased hand hygiene and putting on and taking off required personal protective equipment (PPE).

We value and care about our employees and remind you there are also many resources available for emotional wellness through the UTA Human Resources Selfcare Resources website.

Peroxide Forming Chemicals Pose Danger in Labs

It is important to identify and monitor chemicals which form potentially explosive peroxides.

Peroxides are highly reactive materials and may be extremely shock-sensitive; they are prone to violent decomposition which can be initiated by heat, light, introduction of oxygen, loss of an inhibitor, mechanical shock, or friction. Simply moving or just screwing the cap off a bottle that is contaminated with peroxides can lead to an explosion, injury and/or death.

In general, the more volatile the compound, the greater its hazard, since the evaporation of the compound allows the peroxide to concentrate. Organic peroxide forming materials can form shock-sensitive organic peroxide crystals over time or upon exposure to air. Check each material’s Safety Data Sheet (SDS) to determine if a chemical can form peroxides, and to check for other hazards—most are highly irritating to skin, eyes, and mucous membranes. Minimize exposure to these chemicals.

There are inorganic and organic peroxide forming chemicals. Some inorganic peroxide formers are generally okay to handle, but pose serious incompatibility issues when used with organic chemicals.

The following links provide more information:


EH&S staff members outfit the Maverick Spirit Horses on campus with UTA branded face masks.
EH&S Staff Receive UTA Service Awards

This year six EH&S employees received longevity service awards.

Our 10 year recipients are Rose Hall (left), Occupational Safety Specialist, and Elisabeth Rowlett, Safety Specialist for Chemical Management.

Robert Smith, Associate Director for Fire and Life Safety, has been with the department for 15 years.

Debbie Kirkley started with EH&S 20 years ago as a receptionist, then Administrative Assistant, and is now Coordinator I for Special Programs.

Joel Box has 25 years of service with the university. He worked as a plumber in Facilities Management for 8 years and moved into the position of Fire Safety Specialist in 2002.

Tracy Gardner has reached the milestone of 30 years as a UTA employee. She worked in UC Housing and Human Resources before becoming a Workers’ Compensation Claims Analyst in 2001.

Larry Swartz Joins Fire Safety Team

Larry Swartz was hired as our new Fire Safety Coordinator in February. He brings over 35 years of experience in fire suppression, prevention and emergency medical services.

Larry was Battalion Chief for the Crowley Fire Department for 22 years, and also for four years with the Addison Fire Department. Prior to that he served as a firefighter and paramedic, and also has experience as a 911 telecommunicator. He has an Associate of Applied Science degree in Fire Protection Technology.

Larry and his wife of 35 years, Heidi, have two sons and three grandchildren. In his spare time he enjoys camping and bike riding.

CDC Emphasizes Importance of Getting Flu Vaccination This Year

Efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19, such as stay-at-home and shelter-in-place orders, have led to decreased use of routine preventive medical services, including immunization services. Ensuring that people continue or start getting routine vaccinations during the COVID-19 pandemic is essential for protecting people and communities from vaccine-preventable diseases and outbreaks, including flu.

Influenza (Flu) and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. Because some of the symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar, it may be hard to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone, and testing may be needed to help confirm a diagnosis.

For the upcoming flu season, flu vaccination will be very important to reduce flu because it can help reduce the overall impact of respiratory illnesses on the population and thus lessen the resulting burden on the healthcare system during the COVID-19 pandemic. The CDC believes it’s likely that flu viruses and the virus that causes COVID-19 will both be spreading this fall and winter.

Flu and COVID-19 can both result in serious illness resulting in hospitalization or death, but at this time it does seem as if COVID-19 is more deadly than seasonal influenza. Getting a flu vaccine will not protect against COVID-19, however flu vaccination has many other important benefits, and there is no evidence that getting a flu vaccination increases your risk of getting sick from a coronavirus. It is possible to have flu, as well as other respiratory illnesses, and COVID-19 at the same time.

You can safely get a flu vaccine at many locations including your doctor’s office, health departments, and pharmacies (use VaccineFinder.org to find where flu vaccines are available near you). To protect your health when getting a flu vaccine, practice everyday preventive actions and follow CDC recommendations for running essential errands. Finally, prior infection with COVID-19 or flu does not protect someone from future flu infections. The best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get vaccinated every year.
To help stop the spread of COVID-19, face masks or face coverings for all UTA employees, students, visitors, and vendors are required while in campus buildings and elsewhere on campus where social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.

A mask or face covering is not required if you are working alone in a private office space or a cubicle where you are 6 feet from another person, in a private lab, or in a residence hall room or apartment.

Acceptable Face Masks/Coverings

Face coverings may include various forms of self-made or commercial masks or face covers (i.e. pleated ear loop masks, neck gaiters) made of cloth, other textiles, or other materials such as paper.

Face coverings should:
- Cover the nose, mouth, and below the chin
- Fit snugly, but comfortably, against the side of the face with no gaps
- Include multiple layers of fabric or paper
- Allow for breathing without restriction
- Not include a valve of any kind that may allow respiratory droplets to escape
- If cloth, be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change in shape.
- Do NOT wear masks intended for healthcare workers, for example, N95 respirators

How to Wear

Wear a mask correctly and consistently for the best protection.
- Be sure to wash your hands before putting on a mask
- Do NOT touch the mask when wearing it

Special Situations - Glasses: if you wear glasses, find a mask that fits closely over your nose or one that has a nose wire to limit fogging.

How to Clean

Masks should be washed regularly. Always remove masks correctly and wash your hands after handling or touching a used mask.
- Include your mask with your regular laundry
- Use regular laundry detergent and the warmest appropriate water setting for the cloth used to make the mask
- Use the highest heat setting and leave in the dryer until completely dry

Face Mask/Cloth Covering Protocol

Adherence to the protocol is the responsibility of all University of Texas at Arlington students, faculty, staff, visitors, and vendors. It is expected that all comply with this protocol. Students who have a condition that precludes the wearing of a mask should follow the procedures for obtaining an accommodation by working with the Office for Students with Disabilities. Faculty and staff who have a condition that precludes wearing a face covering should work with their immediate supervisor and HR for accommodations.

Members of our campus community are empowered to respectfully inform others about the protocol in an ongoing effort to enhance awareness and encourage a culture of compliance. An individual who feels that there has been a violation of this protocol may invoke the following actions:

1. The concerned individual should attempt to resolve the problem informally by requesting that the other individual comply with the procedure.
2. If direct appeal fails, the individual not wearing the mask/face covering may be asked to leave the building, office, classroom, or event immediately.
3. If the behavior persists, the individual not wearing the mask/face covering should be reported to their immediate supervisor first. If the supervisor is not available or is unable to assist, faculty should be referred to Faculty Affairs and staff to the Office of Human Resources. Students should be referred to the Office of Community Standards.

Repeat offenses may result in disciplinary action through already established policies and procedures. Members of the UTA campus community should NOT contact the UTA Police Department as UTA PD is not responsible for enforcement of the face covering protocol.

How to take off a mask

1. Carefully, untie the strings behind your head or stretch the ear loops
2. Handle only by the ear loops or ties
3. Fold outside corners together
4. Be careful not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth when removing and wash hands immediately after removing

Graphic provided by the Centers for Disease Control
Some examples are: (Refer to SDS before use!)

- Potassium metal (K)
- Potassium amide (KNH₂)
- Sodium amide (NaNH₂)

**Organic** peroxidizables are among the most hazardous substances handled in the lab. Examples are:

- Isopropyl ether (C₆H₁₄O)
- Cyclohexane (C₆H₁₂)
- Tetrahydrofuran (C₄H₈O)

Most are highly flammable and extremely sensitive to shock, heat, spark, friction, impact, and ultraviolet light. They are also very sensitive to contamination (especially heavy metal compounds, strong acids, and even dust and dirt). The presence of these materials can initiate rapid, uncontrolled decomposition of peroxides and possible fire or explosion. Once withdrawn, the peroxide must never be returned to its storage container.

Peroxides can occur in virtually any kind of organic chemical, however, certain chemicals are particularly prone to peroxide formation and pose special hazards, such as Peroxide Forming Solvents. These compounds produce organic peroxides that are significantly less volatile than the solvent in which they are formed. As a result, evaporative concentration or distillation can produce dangerous levels of peroxides.

Inorganic and organic peroxides, because of their exceptional reactivity and oxidative potential, are widely used in research laboratories, and many are being used and/or stored here at UT Arlington. PIs/Chemical Owners and laboratory users should be knowledgeable of the hazards and safety issues associated with the laboratory use, handling, and storage of peroxide forming compounds. In addition, these types of chemicals must be tested for peroxide concentration upon opening and every three (3) months thereafter. They must be properly disposed of if the peroxide concentration is greater than or equal to 100 ppm, or when the maximum storage time is reached, whichever occurs first (refer to SOP-Peroxide Forming Chemicals).

**Storage and Handling:**

All peroxide forming chemicals should be stored away from light and heat with tightly secured caps and labeled with the date of receipt and date of opening. A laboratory routine should be established to test all peroxide forming chemicals when opened and every three months thereafter.

**Peroxide Forming Chemicals** (continued from page 1)

All peroxide forming solvents should be checked for the presence of any peroxides prior to distillation or evaporation.

Solvents with an inhibitor, such as Butylated Hydroxytoluene (BHT), should be used whenever the presence of this stabilizer does not interfere with intended application.

Uninhibited materials should be stored with care and frequently checked for peroxide formation.

Peroxide-forming solvents should be purchased in limited quantities and older material in inventory should be used first.

Uninhibited materials should be stored with care and frequently checked for peroxide formation.

BE AWARE that when purchasing chemicals from the list in Table A: Severe Peroxide Hazard (as shown in SOP-Peroxide Forming Chemicals), they must be discarded 3 months after opening. When purchasing uninhibited chemicals from Table C: Shock and Heat Sensitive, they must be discarded within 24 hours of opening. These chemicals can spontaneously decompose and become explosive after exposure to air, even without concentration. Substitute a more stable solvent if possible.

**Peroxide Detection:**

There are a variety of methods suitable for the detection of peroxides. The test strips method is the easiest to perform. **In all cases,** run a blank sample (one you know doesn't form peroxides such as n-hexane) so you know what a negative result looks like. If possible, also run a blank sample that you have spiked with some hydrogen peroxide so you will recognize a positive test result. For more information on testing refer to SOP-Peroxide Forming Chemicals.

**Never under any circumstances** touch or attempt to open a container of a peroxide-forming liquid if there are whitish crystals around the cap and/or in the bottle. The friction of unscrewing the cap could detonate the bottle with disastrous results.

**DO NOT TOUCH OR MOVE THE SUSPECT BOTTLE YOURSELF FOR ANY REASON. CALL EH&S at 817-272-2185.**
Telemedicine Feature Now Offered for Workers’ Compensation Injuries

The Workers’ Compensation Injury Management Organization (IMO) Med-Select Network now offers Telemedicine Services. Workers’ Compensation Telemedicine Visits are available 24 hrs./7 days through RediMD. To schedule an appointment call RediMD at 888-733-4635.

RediMD provides workers’ compensation medical care online via web cam or smart phone. You can see and speak with a board-certified physician who can diagnose, recommend treatment, and prescribe medications (when necessary) for your injury. RediMD is available for use days, nights, and weekends.

RediMD treats most workers’ compensation ailments including but not limited to: Burns, Contusions, Strains, Back Injuries, Stings, Allergic Reactions, Infections, Heat Stress, Inhalation Injuries, Headaches, and others.

A computer with internet connection and a web camera, or a smart phone or iPad with internet connection is required for all face-to-face visits.

Please contact IMO if any assistance is needed with this process. Instructions are available on their website (www.injurymanagement.com) or call the network customer service line at 877-870-0638.