

## **FACULTY OF SCIENCE POLICY (2014-01) FOR WORKING ALONE AND/OR AFTER HOURS AT MOUNT ALLISON UNIVERSITY**

### **PREAMBLE**

During regular working hours there are usually several people in the vicinity of researchers and students who are able to assist if an accident occurs, but after hours and during weekends and holidays, this is less likely. This is also less likely if someone is working in the field away from campus. Currently, some departments have guidelines in this area, but there are neither firm rules nor consistency from individual to individual or department to department. Provincial law (NEW BRUNSWICK REGULATION 92-133, under the OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT, O.C. 92-801) requires that rules be in place to govern these situations:

“An employer shall establish a **code of practice** to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of an employee who works alone at any time at a place of employment from risks arising out of, or in connection with, the work assigned.”

As such, a policy to address concerns around working alone is required in the sciences.

Given that there are many areas in science buildings that contain a variety of hazards and potential hazards, what follows are policies and procedures for students, employees, visitors, and others who may find themselves alone in our buildings, particularly after hours and on weekends. On-going independent research sometimes requires that individuals be present in laboratories after hours, possibly unaccompanied. This policy is not intended to obstruct the research process; it is designed to provide procedures for prudent conduct of activities during non-regular hours or while working in the field.

Those who work alone or unsupervised outside of regular hours or off campus must comply with this policy. This stated, it is acknowledged that different work environments and situations call for different interpretations of “working alone or in isolation.” In some situations, a worker may be working in isolation during regular working hours (e.g., if he/she is working in a location where he/she might not be heard if calling for help to others in the building). Thus, depending on circumstances, situations, or the physical environment, specific rules or procedures may be required to limit individuals’ duties in order to avoid risks associated with “working alone or in isolation”, regardless of time and location, and it is the purpose of this policy to ensure that such rules or procedures are developed and followed.

### **DEFINITIONS**

**Regular hours:** Working in laboratories from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday to Friday (except holidays), is defined as working during “regular hours”. Working in laboratories from 5:00 pm to 8:00 am (except during scheduled instructional time), and on weekends and holidays is defined as working “outside of regular hours”.

**Working alone or in isolation:** According to Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, means “*to work in circumstances where assistance would not be readily available to the worker in case of an emergency or in case the worker is injured or in ill health.*”

**Worker:** Can include any and all students (graduate and undergraduate), post-doctoral fellows, technicians, lab instructors, visitors, etc., working in a laboratory or at a field site (i.e., anyone other than the faculty or staff member who is the supervisor of the laboratory space or field site).

**Supervisor:** a faculty or staff member who is responsible for a laboratory space or field site and by the nature of their employment is responsible for supervising a worker(s) in that space or site.

## **POLICY**

### **General**

There must be a well-understood and agreed upon procedure in place for workers who will be working alone to ensure that they are checked on regularly. The frequency of checking depends on the hazard level of the work (see below) and/or the work environment. Evaluating the hazard level should be part of the general safety training that goes on in each laboratory or field site. Note that anyone working with chemicals must have current WHMIS training.

Departments or individual faculty or staff members may establish more restrictive rules or procedures for areas under their control. This is particularly important for workers who may be working off site “alone” or “in isolation” (e.g., first aid training may be required).

Provincial and Federal legislation require supervisors, such as Principal Investigators (PI) or Laboratory Instructors, to ensure the well-being of workers. In a research laboratory, it is the duty of the PI to determine the risk level of the work to be done alone and the monitoring necessary. Even in the case of a highly experienced worker, it falls to the supervisor to ensure that general health and safety information relating to work, WHMIS, safety policies, and emergency procedures are known and understood by the individual.

Every reasonable effort to ensure compliance must be taken by both the supervisor and the worker(s). Persistent non-compliance may result in the removal of laboratory privileges.

This policy does not apply to students working in classrooms outside normal working hours; separate university policies may apply to such work.

### **Students Engaged in Course Laboratory Work**

Students can work in a course laboratory outside of the regular laboratory periods under the following circumstances: during regular hours only; while properly accompanied; and with the permission of the instructor, who is responsible for ensuring that the students receive sufficient instruction to work safely under the contemplated circumstances.

When working in laboratories for course work during regular hours, a qualified person who is familiar with emergency procedures and who is aware of his/her responsibilities to the students must accompany students (e.g., a lab instructor or TA). Students enrolled in course laboratory sections may not perform laboratory work alone or after scheduled hours unless the “Workers Conducting Independent Research Work in a Laboratory” section of this policy is followed,

including the completion of the “FACULTY OF SCIENCE PERMISSION TO WORK INDEPENDENTLY FORM” at the end of this document.

### **Workers Conducting Independent Research Work in a Laboratory**

A worker may use laboratory facilities for independent research only after the supervisor in charge has reviewed experimental procedures and any associated hazards, and has determined that the worker possesses adequate training in proper experimental and emergency procedures.

Workers are responsible for performing their work in accordance with those procedures, and must report all accidents, chemical spills, and unsafe conditions to the supervising faculty or staff member.

Certain laboratory operations may require that a faculty member or another person be present regardless of the time of day. The supervisor will determine what operations require these or other special precautions and inform the workers.

Workers who are conducting laboratory procedures during regular building hours are encouraged to work with a qualified person nearby.

Workers must have written permission from the supervising faculty or staff member prior to working after regular hours in a laboratory or proceeding into the field. See the “PERMISSION TO WORK INDEPENDENTLY” form at the end of this document. The permission form must be completed and on file in each worker’s department or program office and a copy of the completed form must be posted in the laboratory.

Campus Security will require a worker (or workers) to leave the building outside of regular hours if the worker (or workers) does (do) not have a completed “PERMISSION TO WORK INDEPENDENTLY” form in the laboratory.

There must be a well-understood and agreed upon procedure in place for workers who will be working alone to ensure that they are checked on regularly. The frequency of checking depends on the hazard level of the work (see below). Evaluating the hazard level must be part of the general safety training that goes on in each lab.

Workers who are working in laboratories must be made aware of this policy and it is the supervisor’s responsibility to review this policy with each worker. A copy of this policy must be posted in a prominent location in each laboratory.

### **Check-in – Check-out Procedure**

When you are working alone in any laboratory outside of regular hours (before 8:00 am or after 5:00 pm Monday-Friday, or anytime on a weekend or holiday), you must establish a regular check-in routine with someone. Contact persons could include: someone else working in a laboratory on the same floor of your building, a faculty member or graduate student working in his/her office near your laboratory, your supervisor, a family member, a friend or roommate you

can reach by phone or by text, etc. If circumstances warrant, a check-in routine may be required during regular hours as well (e.g., if a worker is in an isolated part of a building).

Before starting work in the laboratory, contact one of the above and agree on a specific check-in interval. This interval will be in accordance with your training and the hazard level (see below). In some instances, the work may be deemed to be sufficiently hazardous that it should only be done when someone else is present in the lab.

Tell the person which room(s) you will be working in, when you expect to finish, and how to contact you. If you do not check in as scheduled and the contact person cannot reach you, she/he should contact Campus Security and tell them the room number you were working in.

Remember to check-out with your contact person when you leave. This is a vital step.

### **Workers Conducting Independent Research Work in the Field**

Workers may also find themselves working “alone” or “in isolation” in the field at any time. As with the laboratory policy, a worker may go into the field only after the supervisor in charge has reviewed operational procedures and any associated hazards, and has determined that the worker possesses adequate training in proper research and emergency procedures and has a reliable means to call for help in the event of an emergency (e.g., a mobile phone).

Workers are responsible for performing their work in accordance with the established procedures, and must report all accidents and unsafe conditions to the supervising faculty or staff member.

Certain field operations may require that a faculty member or another person be present regardless of location and/or time of day. The supervisor will determine what operations require these or other special precautions and inform the workers.

Workers who are working in laboratories that utilize fieldwork must be made aware of this policy and it is the supervisor’s responsibility to review this policy with each worker.

A copy of this policy must be posted in a prominent location in each laboratory that conducts fieldwork. A copy of the policy should be available at the field site.

### **Check-in – Check-out Procedure**

Given the uniqueness of each field site and field research activity, there is no prescribed procedure for daily check-in and check-out. However, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to advise the worker to establish a daily procedure so that someone is aware of the worker’s status on a daily basis. Emergency procedures to deal with a failure to check-in should be established prior to any worker going into the field.

## HAZARD CLASSIFICATION

All rooms/locations must be assigned one of these categories and the relevant information posted in a visible place in the room. Emergency contact information should also be posted. It is up to the supervisor responsible for a laboratory space or field site to determine hazard level(s).

### Hazard level I

- Minimal hazard with respect to the activity and the environment.
- Working alone is acceptable, even outside of regular hours.
- Someone, somewhere should be aware of the worker's whereabouts and schedule, as prescribed in the "Check-in – Check-Out Procedure".
- Checking-in every few hours is recommended.

### Hazard level II

- Some hazard in the activity or the environment, but the risk is lowered by the control measures in place (e.g., specific safety procedures for a given laboratory).
- Working alone is acceptable during working hours.
- Working alone outside of regular hours or in isolated areas is acceptable with the implementation of an effective "Check-in – Check-Out Procedure".
- Checking-in once every 1-3 hours is required.

### Hazard level III

- Considerable hazard in the activity or the environment, but the risk is minimized by having multiple, effective control measures.
- Work is only acceptable when there is another person within shouting distance who has some knowledge of the work, its hazards, and proper emergency response procedures.
- Checking-in every 30-90 minutes is required.

### Hazard level IV

- Considerable hazard in the activity or the environment, and the risk is difficult to minimize by control measures alone.
- Work is only acceptable with the supervisor present.

## RESOURCES

<http://laws.gnb.ca/en/ShowPdf/cr/92-133.pdf>

<http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/workingalone.html>

[http://www.worksafenb.ca/docs/WorkSafeNBOrientationGuide\\_e.pdf](http://www.worksafenb.ca/docs/WorkSafeNBOrientationGuide_e.pdf) (app D & H)

Policy 2014-01 was finalized by the Heads of Science on 23 June 2014

**FACULTY OF SCIENCE PERMISSION TO WORK INDEPENDENTLY FORM**

**SECTION I: WORKER**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervising Faculty or Staff Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Work to be Undertaken:

I have read the *Faculty of Science Policy for Working Alone and/or After Hours at Mount Allison University* and agree to abide by the policy. I have received training in proper experimental, research and emergency procedures and understand those procedures for the work I am authorized to undertake after hours or in the field.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION II: SUPERVISOR PERMISSION**

The worker has been trained in proper experimental, research and emergency procedures for the work to be performed after hours or away from campus and understands the requirements of the *Faculty of Science Policy for Working Alone and/or After Hours at Mount Allison University* and any restrictions on work that can be done without direct faculty or staff member supervision. This worker has completed appropriate safety training.

I approve this request for permission to work after hours or in the field.

Building and Room Number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Hours Access is Allowed: \_\_\_\_\_

Duration of Permission: \_\_\_\_\_

Restriction(s) on Independent Work: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Emergency Phone: \_\_\_\_\_