

UAB SAFETY SHORT

Clutter and Door Propping as Laboratory Safety Concerns

Due to the fast-paced nature of the research environment, campus laboratories often become cluttered from lack of housekeeping and organization. Excess material, such as books, papers, boxes, or Styrofoam increase a building's fire load. Fire load is the weight of combustible material per square foot of floor space. This excess material presents a safety hazards to staff, students, and visitors. In some cases, campus laboratories have been cited by government regulators for excessive clutter and related hazards.

The National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) recommends keeping unnecessary materials to a minimum to maintain a safe and well-organized laboratory. In addition to meeting safety standards, this organization saves limited storage space for the items you really need. Labs should also focus on maintaining proper sprinkler clearance of 18-inches (the space between the sprinkler and the closest non-permanent item). UAB EH&S recommends scheduling periodic Lab Cleanup Days to stay on top of the buildup of materials and keep clutter to a minimum.

Propping open laboratory doors is another common habit seen in research labs, usually for the convenience of moving from one lab to another. The use of doorstops, wedges, or other types of hold-open devices are not permitted by NFPA and UAB fire code. Doors that are designed to self-close must be allowed to close. The ventilation designs of campus laboratory buildings are intended to prevent the air in chemical and biological labs from flowing into hallways and corridors. Propping laboratory doors open disrupts the designed airflow and throws off the building's balanced airflow.

If the temperature in a lab is too hot or cold, the Facilities Division should be contacted promptly to address the issue. You can submit work orders online at uab.edu/facilities. If doorstops or wedges are used to accomplish tasks such as environmental services or moving furniture or materials through the doors, they must be promptly removed once the task is completed.

UAB EH&S appreciates your cooperation in keeping UAB staff, students, and visitors safe.