

SAFETY SHORT



Are You A Chemical Hoarder?

Is your lab's chemical storage area a nostalgic trip to the previous century? Can you chronicle the evolution of JT Baker's labeling system from the fabulous fifties through Y2K? Do your solvents remember where they were when Reagan was shot? Are your storage cabinets so crowded that you cannot find materials that you need – so you order more? If so, you are a chemical hoarder!

Unlike fine wines, chemicals do not get better with age. They clump up, dry out, degrade and may become unstable. The tops crack and the labels fall off. Even if these relics pose no extraordinary hazard, they take up precious space and, honestly, would you trust your research to a reagent older than your post-doc? Some chemicals like ether and picric acid actually become explosive as they age. And so it goes until the dreaded lab audit when OH&S cites you for improper storage, too many flammables, poor housekeeping and 'legacy' chemicals.

A legacy chemical is an unused and unwanted chemical left behind by a previous occupant of the laboratory or abandoned by the current occupant. Answering some basic questions will help you clear out the legacy chemicals and break the hoarding habit.

Clear off a space, carefully remove all those bottles and ask these questions before you put each one back into place: Did I order the chemical, or at least know it came from a reliable source? Is the chemical in date, uncontaminated, with no signs of chemical or physical change? If the answer to these is 'no', then pack it up as waste. For help with disposal questions contact OH&S at 934-3797 or 934-2487.

Is the container in good condition (no leaks, bulging or discolored containers, broken or missing tops)? Is the label in good condition and legible? Does the label identify the chemical and its hazards? If the chemical is still in good shape, but the container needs help – transfer the material to a new, compatible container and re-label it. Otherwise – out it goes.



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If you have a chemical that is still usable, but do not need it now and do not see a need in the near future – offer the chemical to someone who needs it. Check with your department or call OH&S at 934-2487 to let others on campus know that the surplus chemical is available. Once the clutter and excess is gone, your lab will be both cleaner and safer.