

# LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

Generated from Actual Incidents-Written by EHSO

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*Type of Incident:* **Odor call leads to building evacuation**

*What Happened:* A researcher was working in his office in a laboratory building, when he became overwhelmed by an odor chemical in nature, perhaps acetone. He called the on-call Safety Officer. The odor was confirmed by UIC Police. Chicago Fire Department's Hazardous Materials Response Team was called. Per their protocol, the building was evacuated and searched for sources of the odor. When it was determined that the odor had dissipated, the building was reoccupied. Odor complaints in this particular area have been recurrent.

*Immediate Cause:* Possible improper disposal or usage of chemicals in the laboratory causing odors throughout drain or ventilation systems, or nonuse of chemical fume hood.

*Root Causes:*

1. Lack of knowledge of proper chemical disposal procedures. Sewer disposal is not allowed for most chemicals. EHSO operates a chemical disposal service that is free of charge when procedures are followed.
2. Non-adherence to practice of working inside fume hood with volatile, odor-causing, and extremely toxic chemicals.
3. Malfunctioning chemical fume hood.
4. Dry cup sinks in fume hoods, sinks, and floor drains.

*Corrective Action:*

1. No sink disposal of chemical waste, unless waste is considered non-hazardous per EHSO guidelines. This includes collecting all hazardous and solvent (eg acetone) rinsate from cleaning glassware. UIC's Hazardous Waste Management Manual can be requested from [chemwaste@uic.edu](mailto:chemwaste@uic.edu) or found on our website [www.uic.edu/depts/envh](http://www.uic.edu/depts/envh) under "Standards, Manual, and Guidelines".
2. For chemical waste removal, request free pick-up with the "Chemical Removal Form" available at [www.uic.edu/depts/envh](http://www.uic.edu/depts/envh) under "Waste Disposal".
3. Work with hazardous materials such as volatile or extremely toxic materials must be performed in a properly functioning chemical fume hood.
4. Contact [dterpin@uic.edu](mailto:dterpin@uic.edu) for chemical fume hood testing if you have concern about hood function.
5. Keep all unused sinks wet by flushing with water for 5 minutes and add several gallons of water to floor drains, every 4-6 months. Topping off with a small amount of mineral oil reduces the evaporation rate.



**Note: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been inspecting universities and has fined them significantly for improper disposal of hazardous wastes.**