

## Under-Reporting of Incidents – An Opportunity Missed

Hazardous chemicals are commonly used on the campus. Whether work with chemicals is performed in the shops or in the labs, it is routinely done safely and with no adverse effect to the worker or to the environment. Occasionally, however, incidents do occur. For example, over the past few years the staff from the Chemical Safety Office has reviewed the following incidents:

- Titanium metal fire and an explosion in a fume hood
- Pressurized bottle explosion
- Wastebasket fire cause by improper disposal of a chemical
- Large chemical spill
- Leak in a compressed gas set-up



When we investigate these issues we are usually able to determine the direct cause as well as the contributing factors. With this information we work with staff to find ways of preventing future incidents. We also try to take a step back and see how the events relate to other locations on campus. Many lessons that we learn from one incident can be applied elsewhere.

But what's being reported to the Chemical Safety Office? Most of the incidents that we investigate came to our attention because they required some actions from outside resources (e.g., the UWPD, the Madison Fire Department, the building manager) and this usually happens when there is an injury or damage to a facility. This reporting tends to be very limited.

Sometimes events happen in a lab where there is no resulting injury, illness or noticeable damage. A bottle explodes unexpectedly but no one happened to be in front of the bottle at the time. Or perhaps a container of toxic material was spilled, but it was mostly empty at the time so there was no significant exposure. These events tend not to be reported to EH&S. Yet in many cases a slight change in an event could lead to a dramatically different outcome. Perhaps someone was standing in front of the exploding bottle, or perhaps the container that spilled was full. The "no harm, no foul" mentality towards incidents turn them into missed opportunities. The campus as a whole cannot benefit from an incident if it is not reported. The lessons taken from a "near miss" have the potential to prevent a more significant event in another facility.

When an incident happens, even if there is little or no impact at the time, please report it to our department. The Chemical Safety Office website has an easy way to report incidents. Just go to the [www.chemsafety.wisc.edu](http://www.chemsafety.wisc.edu) and click on the link on the right-hand side. Here is a direct link:

<http://www.ehs.wisc.edu/chem-resources-formsdocs-incidentreportform.htm>

Give us a few quick details and we will follow-up with you. Our goal is to make our workplace a safer environment – not to penalize or reprimand anyone for reporting incidents.

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**For More Information Contact:**

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