The Chemical Safety Mechanism
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Office of Chemical Safety

Lab Trash Disposal

Typical laboratory operations can generate large amounts of lab trash. A question that the Chemical Safety Office frequently gets is "How do I get rid of this stuff?". First, let's define what we mean by "lab trash". Lab trash consists of items that may have residual chemical contamination on them as a result of chemical contact and typically includes gloves, aprons, weigh boats, bench top coverings, centrifuge tubes, paper towels, pipettes, sampling tips, and other lab generated lightly contaminated lab-ware. Lab trash *does not* include items containing significant quantities of any hazardous chemical. Sharps and bulk chemicals also have different disposal procedures and are not considered lab trash.

The first thing we try to encourage is re-use. Many items, especially the expensive labware, can be cleaned and used again, thereby minimizing waste. But this is not practical for most items and so disposal is required. Although most lab trash can go into a landfill along with your regular trash, precautions must be taken to prevent exposure to laboratory staff, custodians, or handlers of the trash.

Lab trash should be segregated from your regular garbage. Bagging lab trash as it is produced is a preferred method of containment. This limits the chemical exposure of laboratory staff. These bagged items can be boxed and placed in the normal trash with an "OK to Trash" sticker. Transferring the marked box directly to the buildings dumpster is a prudent practice to limit handling by custodial staff.

Some contaminated items should not be disposed in the normal trash. Items contaminated with products containing acrolein, arsenic compounds, carbon disulfide, cyanide compounds, hydrazine, osmium tetroxide or sodium azide as there sole active ingredient are examples of EPA acutely toxic (P-

list) chemicals that should be bagged and disposed by Chemical Safety. Active ingredients are those that perform the function of the product, regardless of the concentration of those ingredients. Ingredients used as preservatives, solvents, stabilizers, and adjuncts are not active ingredients unless that is the function of the product. A complete list of p-listed chemicals can be found at:

http://www.ehs.wisc.edu/documents/chem-plist.pdf

Also, strong oxidizers, reactive metals, water and air reactive chemical residues can be problematic if disposed of in the trash so collection of these materials by Chemical Safety may be warranted. If you have questions regarding disposal of contaminated items please send chemical safety an email: chemsafety@fpm.wisc.edu.

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