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FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Research Safety in Laboratories

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Description

A student's project about research safety in laboratories prompted by her job as a new researcher in the laboratory where safety precautions were ignored. In this scenario, a student going into a lab tries to understand why researchers don't follow uniform procedures when disposing of toxic chemicals.

Body

Introduction

My interest in research safety began after skimming the recommended safety precautions for working with certain chemicals in the 7.02 lab. Previously, research safety seemed like a non-issue, since everyone agrees that people should be cautious with dangerous substances and try to minimize contact as much as possible. After reading the precautions and observing how one particular chemical, ethidium bromide, was actually handled in lab, I saw that the research safety was not as black and white as I previously assumed. People do not generally agree on how to handle ethidium bromide, and while the recommended safety precautions are very clear, no lab I spoke with actually followed those guidelines. Instead, decisions about how to treat a chemical were influenced not only by the formal guidelines, but by the examples set by coworkers, the attitudes of the supervisor,

the frequency with which the chemicals were used, and by the individual's willingness to take risks. Research safety is not simply a matter of education and implementation; researchers have to assess the hazards of working with a chemical, and use their own professional judgment on how to act.

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Notes

Note: Gwen Crevensten's original version of this paper has been slightly modified to protect the identity of the interviewees.

Author: Gwen Crevensten, Real World Ethics 2.95j, May 1995.

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Use of Materials on the OEC

Resource Type

Case Study / Scenario

Parent Collection

Addressing Problems in Research Ethics

Topics

Collaboration

Lab and Workplace Safety
Safety

Discipline(s)

Chemistry
Computer, Math, and Physical Sciences
Life and Environmental Sciences
Research Ethics