

FDN(wh)Y Me?

As an aid to laboratories in avoiding FDNY Violation Orders (VO) and Summonses, EH&S distributes monthly FDNY inspection findings which resulted in a VO or NOV citation to an actual CU laboratory on either Morningside or Medical Center campus. These real life scenarios are meant to assist you in ensuring that such conditions do not exist in your laboratory.

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Blackout Curtains

During regular weekly inspections of Columbia University laboratories, the FDNY Inspector has issued several violations to laboratories for having non-compliant blackout curtains present in their laboratory. The FDNY enforces regulations that require all decorations in certain occupancies, including Educational and Research Laboratories, be flame resistant. These decorations include blackout, privacy curtains, and draped fabrics which laboratories frequently use with lasers and other equipment. The size of these materials does not matter. The materials can be as small as 1'x1' or as large as 16'x 25'. The requirements remain the same.



EH&S recommends that all blackout curtains purchased be Inherently Flame Resistant (IFR).

Inherently Flame Resistant curtains require documentation from the manufacturer that such curtains are Inherently Flame Resistant as per NFPA 701. The owner of the premises where the treated decoration or scenery will be located must obtain an affidavit of flame-retardant treatment from an FDNY Certificate of Fitness C-15 holder. This individual can both perform the required flame test and issue the affidavit to be submitted to the FDNY. This is a one-time action and will not have to be repeated for the service life of the installed curtains.

This test must be done under the supervision of a C-15 holder. Specifically, the C-15 holder who performed the treatment on the decoration or scenery must be the signee on the affidavit. The affidavit must also note the location of the curtain installation (e.g., building address and room number).

EH&S now has the capability to perform the work mentioned in the paragraph above, so if your laboratory is unsure if they have this affidavit or for certain know that they don't, then contact EH&S to arrange a sample extraction for flame testing.

A different category of FDNY compliant curtains are flame-proofed curtains, which involves treatment of the curtain fabric with a flame retardant chemical. For flame-proofed curtains, it is required to provide documentation from the manufacturer that such curtains are flame-proofed as per NFPA 701. Flame proofing treatment has to be repeated periodically, in order to maintain compliance to the New York City Fire Code. Flame-proofed curtains are not recommended by EH&S.

If your laboratory uses curtains or other decorations, as described above, take the following actions to ensure your laboratory is in compliance with FDNY regulations:

1. Notify EH&S (Labsafety@columbia.edu) who will test and approve these materials. EH&S will then file the affidavit with the Bureau of Fire Prevention no later than ten days after the installation or reinstallation of the decoration or scenery in the premises following the flame-retardant treatment and/or testing of the scenery or decoration.
2. Maintain a copy of the affidavit on the premises for inspection by FDNY.
3. If for any reason blackout curtains are re-located to a different laboratory, the laboratory must notify EH&S (Labsafety@columbia.edu) so changes can be made to the C15 affidavit, which is location-specific.

Please note, the FDNY Chemical laboratory Inspection Unit is on-site weekly at the Morningside and Medical Center campuses. Please visit our website for more information concerning blackout curtains (<https://research.columbia.edu/black-out-curtains-code-requirement-specifications>).

For a consultation before the FDNY inspector gets around to your laboratory, or for any question, concern, or help, please contact a Safety Advisor at: labsafety@columbia.edu.