

FDN(wh)Y Me?

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

June 2024 – Food/Drink in the Laboratory

Food and Drink-Free Labs for Safety

During a regular weekly inspection of Columbia University laboratories, the FDNY fire inspector issued a violation to a laboratory for food/drinks in the laboratory (see photos below). This underscores the critical importance of maintaining a strict no food or drink policy in laboratory environments. The presence of food or drink increases the risk of accidental ingestion of hazardous chemicals, posing significant health risks to lab personnel. Moreover, such items can introduce contaminants, compromising the integrity of experiments and research. Strict adherence to this policy ensures a safe, uncontaminated workspace, protecting both the individuals working in the laboratory and the validity of their scientific findings.

To prevent breaking this policy and giving researchers a location to store their consumables, some laboratories have set up small tables outside the laboratory doors where researchers can place their food/drinks before entering the laboratory. This also sets up a reminder to the researcher to not bring their food/drinks into the laboratory space.

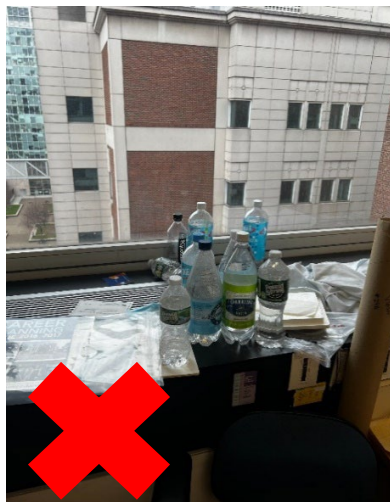


Photo: Food and drink are prohibited in the laboratories. A possible solution is placing a table outside the laboratory door that does not impede egress, where researchers can place their food/drinks before entering.

As always, please contact EH&S at labsafety@columbia.edu for any questions or guidance. Please note, the FDNY Laboratory Inspection Unit is on-site weekly at the Morningside and Irving Medical Center campuses. For a consultation before the FDNY inspector gets around to your laboratory, or for any question, concern, or help, please contact an EH&S Safety Advisor. <https://research.columbia.edu/safety-advisor-team>