

FDN(wh)Y Me?

To aid laboratories in avoiding FDNY Violation Orders (VO) and Summonses (SUM), EH&S distributes monthly FDNY inspection findings that have 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.

November 2022 – Laboratory Curtains and Drapes

The New York City Fire Department has a strong history of incorporating significant lessons learned from historical fires across the country into its compliance programs and, subsequently, the NYC Fire Code. For example, regulations concerning Laboratory Blackout Curtains originate from a 2003 fire at the Station Nightclub in West Warwick, Rhode Island. Because of poorly considered Special Effects, decorations hung around the club's stage caught fire and quickly filled the space with dense smoke, ultimately resulting in the death or injury of more than two-thirds of the club's attendees that night. This tragic event stands as the inspiration behind [NYC Fire Code, section 5006.11](#), which states that,

"[all] curtains and drapes installed in a laboratory unit shall comply with the flame resistance requirements of [\[the NYC\] fire code, Chapter 8](#)," which further states that "[all installations] are inherently noncombustible or flame proofed in an approved method..."

Under this regulation, a Columbia laboratory recently received a violation for decorations hung within their research space. By all accounts, these decorations were in no way similar to the Blackout Curtains (including Laser Curtains) and draperies commonly found in Columbia laboratories. However, they demonstrate how the NYC Fire Code not only pertains to specialized equipment within a laboratory but also embodies a comprehensive approach to fire safety within occupied spaces.

Ultimately this means that any curtain, drapery, or large decoration must be inherently noncombustible or treated to meet the flame resistance performance criteria outlined in the Fire Code and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 701 standard. EH&S strongly recommends that laboratories purchase Inherently Flame Resistant (IFR) items due to the high burden of compliance that comes with maintaining flame-proofed items. This includes reoccurring flame-proofing every three years and annual recertification via flame testing by a Certificate of Fitness (COF) holder. In comparison, IFR Curtains do not require further treatment or certification once purchased and certified by an EH&S COF holder.

Two large curtain suppliers in the NYC area that have been used with high success across the University are linked below:

- [BeamStop'r Laser Safety Solutions](#)
- [Kentek Flex-Guard Laser Safety Curtain](#)

If purchasing from other fabric supplies, please note that for IFR Curtains to be certified, a statement from the manufacturer explicitly attesting that the curtains/decorations are "Inherently Flame Resistant" under the NFPA 701 standard is needed. It may be necessary to request this documentation specifically, as they often are not provided automatically. Additionally, once a curtain arrives, please email all relevant documents to EH&S at labsafety@columbia.edu so that a Safety Advisor can issue and post an Affidavit of Inherently Flame-Resistant Material within the lab as proof of compliance with FDNY regulation.

As always, please contact EH&S at labsafety@columbia.edu for any questions or guidance before purchasing any fabric used as blackout curtains in the laboratory. Additionally, the FDNY Laboratory Inspection Unit is generally on-site weekly at the Morningside and Irving Medical Center campuses. If you would like a consultation before the FDNY inspector gets around to your lab, or for any questions, concerns, or help, please get in touch with an EH&S Safety Advisor today! <https://research.columbia.edu/safety-advisor-team>



Photo Credit: KENTEK®
EH&S recommends that all Blackout Curtains purchased be Inherently Flame Resistant (IFR) given compliance requirements with the FDNY.