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# Beach and BBQ Biosafety: Preventing Foodborne Illness in the Summer Heat

By Katie Fritz, Associate Biosafety Officer

Summertime often brings outdoor barbeques and picnics at the beach. However, warmer temperatures and high humidity also create the perfect environment for bacterial growth in food. Proper food handling and storage during outdoor events is necessary to prevent the spread of microbes that cause foodborne illnesses, such as Salmonella, Escherichia coli, and Listeria monocytogenes. The biosafety principles followed in laboratory settings, such as contamination prevention and disinfection, translate to safe food handling practices that protect the community.

The right amount of heat and humidity are necessary for rapid bacterial growth, as microbes thrive in warmth and moisture<sup>1</sup>. This growth is most accelerated in the temperature range called “The Danger Zone”, which is between 40°F and 140°F<sup>2</sup>. When food is left out without temperature control, bacterial populations can double quickly. In warmer environments, this growth is faster, and food becomes unsafe for consumption in a shorter period of time<sup>3</sup>. For example, Salmonella is one of the most common causes of foodborne illness. These bacteria can be found in improperly cooked food and spread easily through cross-contamination. Leaving food unrefrigerated, especially in summer heat, greatly increases the chances of harmful bacteria reaching levels that can cause illness<sup>4</sup>.

Implementing safe food handling protocols is the best way to reduce the risk of contracting foodborne illnesses during outdoor events. This can be accomplished through the four pillars of food safety: clean, separate, cook, and chill.

- Clean – all utensils, surfaces, equipment, and hands should be thoroughly cleaned before use.
- Separate – prevent cross contamination by keeping raw meat away from other food.
- Cook – ensure that all meat is cooked to a safe temperature, depending on the type of meat.
- Chill – all perishable food should be stored below 40°F within 2 hours of being taken out, or within 1 hour in temperatures over 90°F<sup>5</sup>.

Upholding these practices can be made more difficult during outdoor events. However, planning ahead of time makes it easier to enjoy them safely. Use insulated coolers with ice packs to transport food and avoid leaving any cold food out. Keep cooked food hot until ready to serve, using a grill or insulated containers. Use separate platters and utensils for raw and cooked foods. Bring disinfectants and hand sanitizer to clean surfaces and hands whenever possible<sup>6</sup>.

Practices for preparing and serving food safely closely reflect biosafety principles used in the lab. While researchers prevent personal exposure and contamination of samples, food handlers work to avoid cross-contamination and the spread of foodborne illness. In the lab, personal protective equipment, sterilization, and engineering controls help to maintain safety. Similarly, the use of clean utensils, temperature controls, and separate prep areas help ensure food is safe to eat. Handwashing and glove usage are crucial in each situation. Understanding how microbes function is vital in both settings to reduce risk of exposure and illness.

Recognizing the symptoms of foodborne illness and knowing when to seek medical attention is also crucial. Abdominal cramps, vomiting, diarrhea, and fever are some telltale signs that may point to foodborne illness. These symptoms can typically be managed at home with rest and fluid intake. However, if they persist or worsen, it is important to visit a doctor to prevent complications<sup>7</sup>.

Foodborne illness does not need to disrupt summer fun. When attending outdoor food events, the biosafety principles involved in food handling help establish a safe environment. Minimizing exposure and preventing contamination are essential for keeping people safe.

1) <https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2024/11/climate-change-is-spoiling-food-faster-making-hundreds-of-millions-of-people-sick-around-the-world/#:~:text=Extreme%20heat%20can%20hasten%20food,and%20other%20produce%20eaten%20raw.>

2) <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/how-temperatures-affect-food>

3) <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/danger-zone-40f-140f>

4) <https://extension.umaine.edu/publications/2258e/>

5) [https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/diseasesconditions/communicable-disease/pages/fs-summer-food-safety.aspx#:~:text=Salmonella,Staphylococcus%20aureus%20\(Staph\)](https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/diseasesconditions/communicable-disease/pages/fs-summer-food-safety.aspx#:~:text=Salmonella,Staphylococcus%20aureus%20(Staph))

6) <https://www.fda.gov/food/buy-store-serve-safe-food/handling-food-safely-while-eating-outdoors#:~:text=Keep%20Cold%20Foods%20Cold%20and%20Hot%20Foods%20Hot&text=The%20key%20is%20to%20never,and%20lead%20to%20foodborne%20illness.>

7) <https://www.cdc.gov/food-safety/signs-symptoms/index.html#:~:text=The%20most%20common%20symptoms%20of,down%2C%20and%20signs%20of%20dehydration.>

**Beyond EH&S** is a feature welcoming guest authors from the Columbia community and beyond. These authors will share their expertise on safety and safety related matters.

# Unlocking Safety: Three Keys to a Safer Laboratory

By Grace Katz, Laboratory Safety Manager/Liaison in Diane Re Laboratory

Safety is the most important principle in wet lab research. Although getting valid data to answer meaningful questions is the ultimate goal of our work, feeling safe in a potentially hazardous environment and the short and long-term health of the researchers involved is paramount.

The Re lab uses a mindset of “people-first.” We strive to create a safe environment built upon a few basic principles: trust, knowledge, and organization.

## Trust

Trust is the first and most important tenet of a safe lab environment. When I joined the Re lab, the integration of safety and trust began as early as my interview process. Dr. Diane Re made it clear to me that her main priority was trust between all her team members and herself. She told me the very first time that we met that she wanted to create an environment where no one would ever feel that they could not make a mistake and that she wants open communication, even when mistakes are inevitably made.

Trust between team members fosters comfort and makes it so that we never sacrifice our collective safety or the integrity of an experiment because we are embarrassed by an error. In our lab, it is always okay to ask for help or to admit when something goes wrong.

## Knowledge

The next tenet that we feel is crucial for building and maintaining a safe lab environment is knowledge. We ensure through a thorough onboarding and training process that every new member of the lab knows the information they need to be safe and successful.

It has become a tradition for every new hire on their first day to receive a long list of Rascal trainings and spend the entire day (and usually the next day) completing them. These trainings are not only a requirement for working but a great resource for new lab members to understand the daily practices of the laboratory.

In addition to the Rascal trainings, each new researcher is given a tour of the lab by a safety mentor who demonstrates and points out all of the safety features—eye wash, safety shower, spill kits, etc.—on their first day.

After the initial onboarding, we continue to strengthen the knowledge of lab members by ensuring the help of more experienced mentors and availability of all protocols and SDS, both physical copies and stored on our shared OneDrive. Before doing any new experiment, new members of the lab shadow experienced team members so that they can understand the process comprehensively.

## Organization

In addition to preparedness and understanding, an organized workspace is the final key to maintaining a safe lab. The best work is done on a cleared and cleaned bench where you have the space to work without knocking things over. It is also crucial to designate space on shelves for each item so that things do not become crammed and overflowing.

Additionally, EH&S can provide labels for the storage of hazardous chemicals and various warning labels so that everyone can quickly and easily identify hazards.

To maintain a safe lab environment, our lab integrates trust, knowledge, and organization. Understanding of the reasonable expectation of error, onboarding, mentoring, training and readily available safety information, and keeping a clean workspace help us form the most effective and secured research conditions.

## Team EH&S 2025! Completes Team Relay Marathon

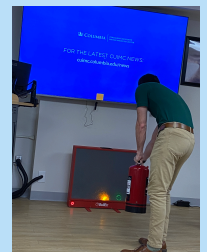


Team members who completed the 26.2 miles at the Armory on April 24, 2025 include (l-r): Kathleen Crowley, Pam Shively, Lauren Kelly, Kyle Marquez, Sarah Aloe, and Peter Caracappa.

## Georgian Fire Drill

EH&S participated in the fire drill led by Matthew O'Hanlon, Director of Fire Safety, CUIMC Facilities Management on April 2, 2025.

Pictured is Kyle Marquez, Associate Health Physicist putting out the simulated fire. The drill included offices in the Georgian Building on the first two floors.



Dr. Peter Caracappa presents Dr. Joshua Weintraub with a plaque in grateful recognition for his years of service and leadership as Chair of the Joint Radiation Safety Committee. Thank you, Dr. Weintraub, for all your contributions and attention to safety. Wishing you all the best!



EH&S staff (and a few colleagues from HR) participated in CPR/AED training on February 12, 2025. Instruction was provided by Emergency Skills, Inc. Members of the EH&S staff also completed Naloxone Training on March 12, 2025 provided by Columbia Health's Opioid Overdose Prevention Program. Each participant received a Naloxone kit that will hopefully never be needed.



Reminder that **all researchers** in a wet laboratory must be current with Laboratory Safety Training!

If you are taking it for the first time, please take [TC4951: Lab Safety, Chemical Hygiene, Hazardous Waste Management, and Fire Safety Initial Training](#). The refresher course is [TC0950](#).

Also, remember to take courses which are specific to your laboratory activities (use the [Training Finder](#) to learn more). These could be on RASCAL or provided by your PI or senior lab personnel.

# Safety Measures for Flammable Solids: Critical Considerations for Research Laboratories

By Lu Salamy, Safety Advisor II

In university research environments, flammable solids present distinct hazards that require careful attention to safety. These materials are capable of igniting through friction and absorption of moisture which demands that users be diligent, especially regarding storage and handling, to prevent dangerous incidents in the laboratory.



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HAZMAT\\_Class\\_4\\_Flammable\\_solids](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HAZMAT_Class_4_Flammable_solids)

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) classifies flammable solids as materials that can readily ignite through friction, and cause or contribute to a fire<sup>1</sup>. In research laboratories, common examples of flammable solids include metal powders (magnesium, aluminum, zinc), certain organic compounds, sulfur, and various reactive materials used in synthesis reactions<sup>2</sup>. According to the American Chemical Society's (ACS) Committee on Chemical Safety, laboratory incidents involving flammable solids account for approximately 18% of all research-related fire incidents, with higher prevalence in materials science and chemistry departments<sup>3</sup>. Flammable solids must be handled according to their Safety Data Sheet (SDS). SDSs are the primary resource for information on handling procedures, as well as hazard identification, first aid measures, toxicological properties, and regulatory information. A case study conducted by the Chemical Safety Board on an explosion at Texas Tech University, emphasized the importance of laboratory personnel consulting the specific SDS for each flammable solid before it is handled, because safety precautions can vary significantly between seemingly similar compounds<sup>4</sup>.

Section 7 of the SDS contains precise handling instructions, while Section 9 outlines physical and chemical properties relevant to safety<sup>5</sup>. Research laboratories must maintain an updated SDS library accessible to all personnel working with these materials. At Columbia University, researchers have access to a comprehensive SDS database via [ChemWatch](#).

While SDSs provide material-specific guidance, most flammable solids share common storage requirements. The National Research Council's Prudent Practices in the Laboratory recommends:

- Storage in cool, dry environments away from direct sunlight
- Separation from oxidizers, acids, and other incompatible materials
- Minimization of quantities stored in laboratory spaces<sup>6</sup>

Laboratories handling flammable solids should implement specific protocols including:

- Designated workspaces with appropriate ventilation – typically chemical fume hoods or glove boxes - for handling these materials
- Regular training for researchers on material-specific hazards. See [TC2100, Chemical Storage and Segregation 101](#) and [TC4951, Lab Safety, Chemical Hygiene, Hazardous Waste Management, and Fire Safety Initial Training](#) on RASCAL to start
- Proper personal protective equipment, as specified in the SDS

Research laboratories should also create targeted emergency response plans for flammable solid incidents. These should include:

- Appropriate fire extinguisher selection (many flammable solids require Class D extinguishers) Contact EH&S for consultation about what fire extinguisher best suits the laboratory's hazards
- Spill containment procedures specific to the materials in use
- Evacuation plan and emergency contacts

In university research settings, the safe handling of flammable solids requires a systematic approach combining SDS compliance, proper storage conditions, laboratory-specific protocols, and emergency preparedness. By prioritizing these safety measures, research communities can minimize risks while maintaining productive scientific investigations.

1) Occupational Safety and Health Administration. (2023). Laboratory Safety Guidance: Flammable and Combustible Materials.  
 2) University of Georgia Office of Research Safety and Environmental Safety Division. (2020). Flammable Solids  
 3) American Chemical Society Committee on Chemical Safety. (2024). Safety Alert: Laboratory Incidents Analysis.  
 4) Chemical Safety Board. (2023). Case Study: University Laboratory Flammable Solid Incident.  
 5) Hazard Communication Standard. (2022). Requirements for Safety Data Sheets. 29 CFR 1910.1200.  
 6) National Research Council. (2023). Prudent Practices in the Laboratory: Handling and Management of Chemical Hazards

## Meet the EH&S Staff



**David Raharijao**  
Data Analyst

David has been supporting EH&S and Columbia University as a Data Analyst since October 2, 2023. With a keen analytical mind and a passion for data, David plays a crucial role in ensuring the safety and well-being of the university community. Hailing from Antananarivo, the capital city of Madagascar, David shares an interesting tidbit about his hometown.

The name "Antananarivo" translates to "City of the Thousand," a historical reference to the time when the local king stationed a thousand men there to guard the territory. David's journey began as a student intern at the City Park Foundation, where he and a team of fellow students tended to a community garden. This experience ignited his passion for growth and development, motivating him to strive for self-improvement every day.

When it comes to his personality, David likens himself to a cat. He describes himself as cautious yet curious, preferring the comfort of home while occasionally peering out the window to explore the world beyond. This blend of introspection and curiosity fuels his analytical work at Columbia. Inspiration plays a significant role in David's life. He resonates with the thoughts of author James Clear, who emphasizes the importance of decision-making. David reflects on a paraphrased idea from Clear: "When you say No, you say No to one option; when you say Yes, you say No to all other options." This perspective guides him in navigating challenges and finding efficient solutions.

To unwind after work, David enjoys taking walks in the park, allowing him to clear his mind and recharge. His favorite pastimes include listening to music, watching tv series, and reading, providing a well-rounded balance to his work life. David finds solace in reading and enjoys immersing himself in books, currently delving into a comprehensive history of China. David also expresses a desire to learn more about cooking, showcasing his eagerness for personal growth. One of David's most cherished traits is his ability to listen. He believes that everyone has a unique story to share, and he values the insights that come from engaging with others.

If given the chance to live anywhere, David would choose Telluride, Colorado, drawn by its stunning natural beauty. He dreams of a world where he could sport a mustache reminiscent of Tom Selleck's, showcasing his lighthearted personality.

### Follow the Buzz on Electrical Safety

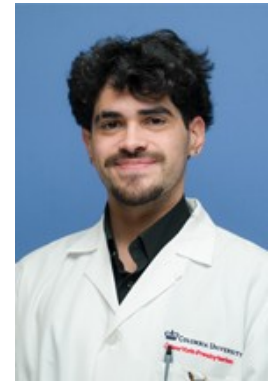
<https://research.columbia.edu/electrical-safety>

EH&S has recently published helpful information for laboratory researchers working with electrical equipment.

Stay tuned for additional content!



**Emilio Vega**  
Associate Health Physicist



As EH&S continues to celebrate the diverse talents and backgrounds of its staff, this month the spotlight shines on Emilio Vega, an Associate Health Physicist who has been with the team since March 26, 2024. Hailing from the quaint town of Jamesburg, New Jersey, Emilio's hometown is so small that it boasts no traffic lights, supermarkets, or even a high school.

This unique upbringing has shaped his perspective and resilience, qualities that he brings to his work every day.

Emilio describes himself as having a personality closely aligned with that of a snow leopard—graceful, adaptable, and resilient. He draws inspiration from the words of Nikola Tesla, who said, "We are all one. Only egos, beliefs, and fears separate us." This philosophy resonates deeply with him, motivating him to learn the hidden truths and patterns of the universe, governed by the forces and phenomena of nature, with the aim of healing and uplifting others.

When he is not immersed in the world of health physics, Emilio enjoys playing guitar and making music across various genres, including rock, jazz, and indie. His passion for creativity extends beyond music. Emilio is currently working on several sewing and design projects, and enjoying the art of thrifting and upcycling.

As a proud fan of the New Jersey Devils (ice hockey), Emilio finds joy in sports, but he also finds other ways to unwind after a long day. He loves hanging out with friends and exploring the city, discovering new restaurants and activities. If given the chance to live anywhere, he dreams of a serene life in the Poconos, Pennsylvania, where he envisions a lake house surrounded by acres of land—though he also has a deep appreciation for the vibrancy of New York City.

Emilio's perspective on the world is both thoughtful and compassionate. If he could change one thing, it would be to redistribute wealth to those countries and individuals who truly need it. His first job at Dunkin' Donuts taught him the value of hard work and community, lessons that continue to guide him in his professional journey.

In his pursuit of knowledge, Emilio expresses a keen interest in neurology, particularly the biophysics of consciousness. He believes that understanding these complex subjects can lead to greater insights into the human experience.

As he navigates his career, Emilio holds onto a piece of professional advice that resonates with him: "Do your best and the universe will work with you; while you may not understand immediately why things happen, trust that things will unfold in your best interest." This mindset not only reflects his resilience but also his commitment to personal and professional growth.

# Safely Seeing Clearly: The Importance of Laser Safety Glasses

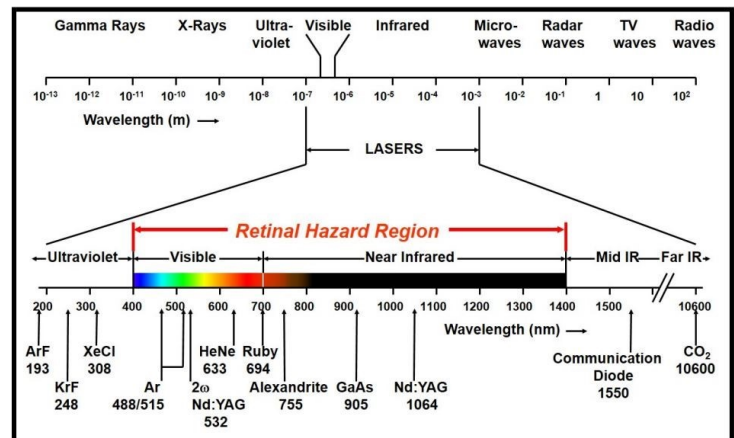
By Emilio Vega, Associate Health Physicist

Over one hundred years ago, Albert Einstein laid the groundwork for laser technology with his principle of stimulated emission. Today, lasers have an array of applications ranging from novel tools used during experiments in research laboratories, to therapeutic practices within clinical spaces, to fancy cat toys. While most lasers available to the public are not strong enough to cause serious damage, even the weakest laser can harm someone's eyes if pointed directly at them.

According to the American National Standards Institute of Laser Safety, protective eyewear must be worn by those operating class 3B (5-500mW) and class 4 (>500mW) lasers. These glasses attenuate the intensity of laser light while transmitting enough ambient light for safe visibility. No single lens material is useful for all wavelengths or for all laser exposures, which is why there are different coatings and colors depending on the energy of the photons comprising the laser beam. Wavelengths range from ultraviolet to infrared depending on the desired application of laser radiation. The range of commonly available lasers is from 180 nanometers to 10.6 micrometers respectively.

In choosing protective eyewear, careful consideration must be given to the operating parameters of the laser system, maximum permissible exposure limits, and wavelength. Optical density characterizes the ability of the eyewear lens to filter and reduce the intensity of specific laser light transmitted to interact with the human eye by factors of ten; so an optical density grading of 1 will reduce light transmitted by a factor of 10, and a grading of 2 will reduce exposure by a factor of 100, and so on. OD demarcation will also display the wavelength that the glasses are effective against. It is extremely important that laser users wear the appropriate laser safety eyewear correctly. Be mindful that general safety glasses, contact lenses, or sunglasses are not considered laser protective equipment.

Even when the operator is not near the path of the beam, appropriate safety glasses should still be worn to protect one's eyes from secondary radiation from potentially reflective materials. There are two types of reflection to be aware of: specular and diffuse reflection. Specular reflection is reflection off a flat surface that keeps the laser beam quality intact and monoenergetic. Diffuse reflection is reflection off an uneven surface such that photons are scattered in different directions and with varying energies. While diffuse reflection can still be damaging if the laser is especially powerful, specular reflection poses the greater risk to those around the laser.



The eye is vulnerable to short-term or permanent injury if exposed to laser radiation. The location and extent of injury depends on the wavelength and the energy absorption characteristics of the ocular media. Lasers cause biological damage by depositing heat energy in a small area, or by photochemical processes. Infrared, ultraviolet, and visible laser radiation are all capable of causing damage to the eye. Corneal opacities (cataracts) or retinal injury may be possible from chronic, as well as acute, exposures to excessive levels of either visible or invisible laser radiation. There are three main eye injuries that can occur: thermal injuries, photochemical injuries, or microcavities (retinal explosions). Thermal injuries are burns caused by elevated temperature after absorption of laser energy which can happen with photons of any wavelength. Microcavities are an explosive effect when short laser pulses are absorbed by the retina. Most commonly this occurs with near infrared lasers and can cause severe vision loss. Photochemical injuries are caused by chemical reactions in ocular tissue after absorption of high energy photons. This interaction is primarily observed with blue and ultraviolet wavelengths and can result in cataracts and/or severe vision loss as well.

Eye hazards are easily controlled by using laser safety eyewear that is appropriate for the specific laser system, or by other engineering safety controls. While laser technology has revolutionized countless industries and even found its way into everyday life, its potential to cause serious eye injuries should not be underestimated. From thermal burns to photochemical damage and retinal microcavities, the dangers associated with direct and reflected laser exposure are real and often irreversible. Understanding the mechanisms of laser-induced injuries is essential for safe laser operation. Most importantly, using the correct protective eyewear tailored to the specific laser's wavelength and power level is a critical and effective measure in preventing ocular harm. Laser safety is not just a recommendation- it's a responsibility. To get in touch with the Laser Safety Program, please email [lasersafety@columbia.edu](mailto:lasersafety@columbia.edu).

# The Power of Recycling: Why Responsibly Recycling Batteries Is Important

By Flavia Villegas Landivar, Associate Manager, Hazardous Materials Program

Every battery that is disposed of carelessly can ignite a much bigger problem — literally. Fires, toxic pollution, and public safety risks are just some of the consequences of these choices. In 2024, multiple incidents involving used batteries — especially lithium-ion batteries — caused devastating fires in New York and across the country.

The main reason behind these incidents is improper disposal of used batteries. This action has led to fires at waste management facilities and even during regular trash transportation, causing garbage trucks to catch fire, such as in the photograph. These incidents have put workers in danger, disrupted towns and facility operations, and released toxic materials that contribute to air and water pollution.



## Why are these incidents happening?

Many people are unaware that used batteries are classified as hazardous waste and that it is illegal to dispose of rechargeable batteries and lead acid batteries in the trash. This is mainly because they contain chemicals and heavy metals like cadmium, lead, zinc, manganese, nickel, silver, mercury, and lithium. Additionally, batteries can catch fire or even explode if they are improperly handled, overcharged, short-circuited or crushed.

## What are we doing to prevent these incidents at Columbia University?

In 2024, the University's waste program successfully shipped 8,964 pounds (about half the weight of a school bus) of used batteries from for recycling. The Battery Recycling Program continues to expand, now offering more frequent service from centralized placed battery recycling containers across all Columbia campuses. This program plays a vital role in safely protecting the community and ensuring compliance with city and state regulations. Moving forward, EH&S is committed to growing the program and raising awareness about the importance of recycling batteries properly — helping to prevent fire incidents and promoting a safer environment.



## How can you do your part?

It only takes a few simple steps to make a big difference. Use the Columbia designated recycling containers for all types of batteries, and make sure to tape the terminals or ends. This simple step helps prevent contact with other batteries or metals, significantly reducing the risk of fire. You can easily find the location of the containers by scanning the QR code or visiting the [EH&S website](#).

If you have lead-acid batteries, leaking, bulging, or damaged batteries, keep them separate from others and contact EH&S for disposal by emailing [hazmat@columbia.edu](mailto:hazmat@columbia.edu) to request a special pickup.

Finally, if you have batteries at home, take advantage of local household hazardous waste events, or visit a [drop-off location](#) to ensure they are disposed of properly.

## Why should we care?

When a battery is placed in a collection container, it enters the recycling stream where it is ultimately handled by waste management workers. Materials like lithium, cobalt, and nickel will be extracted and reused. This action reduces landfill waste and prevents contamination of soil and water. Taping batteries and helps avoid fires in facilities and/or during transportation, may prevent property damage and disruptions in general. By recycling responsibly, we not only protect our environment and avoid catastrophic incidents but also contribute to a safer, more sustainable world.

### Children and Minors in University Laboratories

- No one under the age of 14 is allowed into a Columbia University Laboratory, unless present on an organized tour or field trip for strictly observational purposes. (Even if a child is under the supervision of a parent or guardian, their presence is strictly prohibited.)
- In addition, no one under the age of 18 is allowed to handle human blood, human cell lines or "other potentially infectious materials," research animals, or be left unattended in a lab.
- For more information, please refer the [Guidelines for Short-term Visitors in Research-related and Clinical Activities](#).

### College of Dental Medicine Awarded Student Safety Training Compliance

Environmental Health and Safety proudly recognizes The College of Dental Medicine for three consecutive years of achieving 100% compliance in student safety training. A total of 1,398 students successfully completed seven courses each, amounting to an impressive 9,786 courses. This commitment to safety at CDM is a testament to the hard work and dedication of Martha Adorno and the entire CDM staff, who effectively communicated with both EH&S and the students to ensure this success.

Congratulations!



**Editorial Staff:** Kathleen Crowley, Marianne McCartney, Chris Pitoscia, Pam Shively  
Please share questions or comments with us at [newsfeedback@columbia.edu](mailto:newsfeedback@columbia.edu)