

LESSONS LEARNED

September 2012

The following is a summary of a recent incident at Columbia University. The information presented is intended to provide awareness and help readers plan against the occurrence of a similar situation in their laboratory or work area.

Benzene Spill Shuts Stock Room

Four liters of benzene, a potent solvent and known human carcinogen, spilled in a chemical stock room forcing closure of the space for greater than 24 hours. The stock room was evacuated and Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S) was notified immediately following the spill. The response spanned two days, and required coordinated efforts from EH&S, Public Safety, and a third-party vendor. Dozens of solvent-soaked floor tiles were removed to fully remediate the spill and return the stock room to a safe working environment.

The spill occurred when the 4L bottle, held with one hand, was inadvertently dropped by a student walking from a chemical storage area to a waiting cart, shattering upon impacting the floor. Carrying the bottle out of the chemical storage area with a bottle carrier or tote would have likely prevented this incident.

Lessons Learned

- Always use a cart with a low center of gravity and raised edges or a bottle-carrier when [moving hazardous chemicals](#). It is important to follow safe chemical transportation practices, whether the chemicals are being moved from one location to another or within the same space.

For further information on this or any other safety related matter, please contact the [EH&S office](#).