

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.

Dark Room Leak & Delayed Response

Film fixer solution leaked from a poorly maintained photo-processing unit and onto the floor in a dark room. The photo-processing unit malfunctioned and overloaded the silver recovery unit, resulting in a half gallon of fixer leaking onto the floor.

Remediating the leak required a coordinated response between Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S), Facilities, laboratory personnel, and a photo-processing equipment vendor. This response was delayed when dark room users waited three hours after first identifying the leak to notify EH&S.

New York City, **by law**, requires a log of all photo-processing work be maintained by the operator. All dark room users are responsible for completing the [dark room log sheet](#) when the photo-processor is used. The log is not only a regulatory requirement, but is used by University vendors to ensure timely maintenance is performed on photo-processing and silver recovery units. A key component of the [Silver Recovery Policy and Procedures](#), the dark room log sheet was mounted near the photo-processing unit but found blank at the time of the incident.

Lessons Learned

- Notifications to EH&S, Public Safety, and Facilities **must** be made immediately. Delaying response efforts can be costly in terms of environment, safety, and health.
- New York City law requires a log of all photo-processing work be maintained by the operator. All dark room users are responsible for completing the [dark room log sheet](#) when the photo-processor is used. The log is not only a regulatory requirement, but is used by University vendors to ensure timely maintenance is performed on photo-processing and silver recovery units.

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