University of BRISTOL

School of Physics

Guidelines for staff and visitors: cleaning labs and safe access

Background

The School of Physics requires its labs to be kept clean and tidy with bins emptied on a regular basis to avoid build-up of rubbish which could cause accidents and help spread fire. Physics has a duty of care to ensure the safety of everyone who may enter our labs, including cleaning staff, and to ensure that any possible contamination is not spread to other areas.

Labs

The potential dangers in labs can take many forms, some are reasonably obvious e.g. chemicals, electricity, lasers, moving parts and heat sources. Others are less obvious e.g. radiation, magnetic fields, cryogenics, biohazards and nano-particles.

Some labs contain risks that could accidentally be transferred to another area if not handled correctly e.g. biohazards or radiation. These require additional precautions to prevent the transfer of contamination on mops, brushes, shoes, etc.

Outside each room in Physics is a 'traffic light' sign which indicates the severity of the risk present in the room together with the name of the person to be contacted for access or in the event of an emergency.

- GREEN circle – mainly offices, safe to enter (usual courtesy required)
- AMBER triangle – hazardous area – requires local induction or escorting
- RED square – high risk – no entry unless escorted or trained to work in the area

There are also safety warning notices outside some labs, e.g. laser warning, bio-hazard, radiation, magnetic field. These identify the main risks present, there is also a lab plan, usually located outside the room, showing the main location of each risk.

Cleaning

A cleaning agreement or regime should be worked out between the lab owner and the cleaning supervisor. It should include:

- Access rules and inductions
- Type of risk in the lab (a formal risk assessment must be written)
- Frequency of required cleaning
- What should be done, including cleaning methods
- Any decontamination procedure that the lab user must undertake before the cleaner can start work
- Any areas to avoid
- What can and cannot be placed in bins and how the contents should be disposed of

Cleaning risk assessments should be reviewed annually by the lab owner in conjunction with the cleaning supervisor.

If there is a change in the type of risk in an area, a new risk assessment and cleaning agreement must be written and signed by both parties before cleaners enter the room again.

If, for any reason, the cleaners believe that the risk to them is not as described in the risk assessment or cleaning agreement (e.g. new experiments, spillages, wrong items in bins or agreed procedures not being followed) they should report their findings to their supervisor and refrain from cleaning the lab until the issue is resolved.