

Background Regarding a University Safety Committee

In December, 2009, a research assistant at UCLA was preparing an experiment under the hood in a chemistry laboratory. She had a bachelor's degree in chemistry and had worked in a chemical industrial laboratory prior to going to UCLA. She had done the preparation at least once before, and was trying to expand it. She was not wearing a lab coat. A postdoctoral researcher was also in the room.

For reasons not fully understood, an accident occurred, chemicals were spilled, a fire started, and she was badly burned. She died 18 days later from her injuries.

The District Attorney of Los Angeles filed criminal charges against the Regents and the supervising professor, citing several safety violations. UCLA and the Regents settled by paying a fine, agreeing to very rapidly implement more robust safety policies, and establishing a \$500,000 scholarship fund in the student's name. The criminal case against the professor is proceeding through hearings and preparation for trial.

This case, and others around the country, have led to some deep reviews of safety practices and cultures in universities. The ASU Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S) office took note of the issues in California and also began a review. A special Laboratory Safety Committee, consisting of faculty and administrators, was formed. An initial report was prepared by June 2013 which made numerous recommendations. The Provost Office is considering the formation of a University committee, with chemical safety being the main focus of discussion.

There is a strong desire among many faculty to enhance the culture of safety at ASU, especially with regard to students. Endorsement of this enhancement by the faculty through the Senate is considered to be essential to wide-spread acceptance. At the request of the Senate President, the RCA reviewed the report from the Lab Safety Committee and expressed numerous concerns. A special meeting of a RCA subgroup was held with the principle faculty sponsors of the report, and a plan of action was agreed upon.

The two motions to the Senate implement the plan. A new ACD policy is proposed that expresses responsibilities for safety in general terms. Although they are essentially equivalent to those stated in the EHS manual, some aspects pertain directly to principal investigators and the policy is an important reminder towards a stronger safety culture.

The second motion directs the UAC, acting on behalf of the Senate, to work with the administration to form a University Safety Committee (USC). It provides guidance about the committee, but does not constrain the administration and provides a deliberative path to possible new requirements. If adopted soon, discussions could be done over the Summer.

The USC would have responsibilities similar to those at other universities. Initially, the USC would likely need to obtain information from all academic units and research areas about common work spaces that pose potential hazards. Policies could then be developed that would mitigate against the risks, tailored to the nature of the risks in each case.