



Safe Work Practices for the Environmental Laboratory

Frank R. Spellman

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Make your environmental lab--and lab technicians' work practices--the safest possible.

- * Protect workers from hazardous material they handle on-site
- * Protect the civilian population from harm in a hazardous materials emergency
- * Prevent accidents before they happen

The purpose of Safe Work Practices for the Environmental Laboratory is twofold:

1. For the person designated as the laboratory's Chemical Hygiene Officer or Safety Officer, this text is a user friendly reference that will provide a format, a template, a guide to compliance with OSHA's Laboratory Standard (29 CFR 1910.145); and
2. for the person who is assigned to work in the environmental laboratory, this user-friendly text provides the information needed not only to perform routine laboratory tasks correctly, but also to perform them safely.

The environmental lab is involved with performing analytical testing and sampling protocols relating to air, soil, biosolids, sludges, drinking water, wastewater, groundwater, stormwater, waste characterization, petroleum products, and HRSD/NPDES effluent studies. Many wastewater treatment plants and water works have their own environmental laboratories. These labs primarily perform analysis of process conditions to ensure optimization of the process. However, even these small labs (a few are quite large) perform "environmental sampling" and therefore are environmental labs.

The actual genesis of the environmental laboratory can be attributed to the environmental regulations that have been generated by USEPA, AOAC, ASTM, NIOSH, OSHA, and other regulatory and advisory entities. The typical environmental laboratory contains several different types of hazards the lab worker must guard against. This is the case even though modern environmental laboratories have been designed to take maximum advantage of engineering controls that work to "engineer-out" most hazards.

The main hazard discussed in this text has to do with hazardous materials--dangerous chemicals and compounds--and the effect they can have on work practices. OSHA is quite specific in regard to protecting the laboratory worker from harm that could result from handling hazardous materials--these specifics are discussed in detail throughout this text.

It is important to point out that this text will provide the user with more than just a "safety book." For example, this text provides the user with a sample Chemical Hygiene Plan, it discusses various safe work practices for standard operating procedures normally performed in the environmental laboratory, and it discusses procedures to use for emergency response activities, such as clean-up of chemical spills.

The bottom line is that probably the most important benefit to be derived from using this text is the exposure the user receives to the lessons and examples presented throughout the text; these lessons learned and examples provide information on how to make your environmental laboratory and the performance of your individual work practices safer.

When you get right down to it, isn't this what a safety text should be all about?

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