

Closing the Door on Lab Safety Hazards



Most of us think of lab doors as simply workplace entrances and exits. They are also very important to LIFE SAFETY and HAZARD CONTROL. There is a natural tendency to prop open lab doors when walking frequently between rooms. This practice may be more convenient, but is also compromises the safety of the laboratory and surrounding areas.

Consider this:

- **Closed lab doors help contain chemical vapors and odors within the workplace and facilitates their efficient removal by the ventilation system!** Most labs are designed to be at negative pressure – air flows from the corridor into the lab and is exhausted outside. This design is based on the lab door being closed. With the door open, the air balance between the lab and the corridor is easily defeated, this allows hazardous (or at least malodorous) chemical vapors to concentrate in the lab and escape into the hallways.
- **By keeping doors open the fire safety of the corridors are negated.** Certain exit access corridors are separated from other parts of the building by walls having a 1-hour fire resistance rating. Laboratory doors that open into a corridor must have a minimum 20-minute fire protection rating. A propped open door compromises the protection that these special walls provide to workers escaping the building in a fire.
- **It is very important not to obstruct lab doors as they are your route to safety in an emergency!** Since doors obviously serve as an exit from the lab space, it is important not to place obstructions near them so personnel can quickly exit in an emergency. Even in modular labs where there may be more than one door, a good policy is to ensure that at least two exits are readily accessible and not blocked.
- **Don't block lab door window panes with paper, lab coats, or other items. The window provides for your safety and security.** The ability of emergency and security personnel to see into the laboratory is necessary to identify, notify, and assist individuals during emergency evacuations and to assist security personnel in locating people in need of emergency assistance, especially after normal working hours. For labs with locked doors in accordance with radiation safety, select agent, and other requirements, it is even more critical that the door windows not be blocked. Passersby who suspect a problem in a locked lab, even though they would not be able to enter, could see into the lab area and summon help if required.

Remember that when it comes to laboratory safety, keeping a CLOSED DOOR generally means keeping an open mind to SAFETY.