Code of Good Health and Safety Best Practice Guide

MRC policy will provide a safe environment and employ best practice to ensure health, safety and welfare within the workplace. This document sets the expected best practice guidance for the Code of Good Health and Safety that must be followed in all MRC establishments.

Definition

Good Health and Safety Practice (GHSP) is a code that reflects the work practices, ethos and culture of the MRC. This code is to be adopted by all MRC staff, students and visiting workers whether in MRC managed laboratory areas or host laboratories. The principles embodied in the GHSP code allow a framework within which laboratory and other activities can be carried out where identified hazards and risk to users, consumers, third parties and the environment are controlled to an acceptable level. GHSP includes attitude and behavioural risks to self, colleagues, and visitors. Working within the code framework of GHSP ensures that work activities are correctly planned, carried out, monitored, recorded, reported and archived.

Directors Summary

The Code of Good Health and Safety Practice must be adopted by all those working in MRC managed laboratories. In shared laboratory areas, MRC staff, students and visiting workers should adopt this code to emphasise the ethos and attitude of the MRC.

Directors, section heads, principal investigators, group leaders and other senior managers must ensure that all those affected are aware of and adopt this Code. Implementation of this Code will ensure the ethos and culture of the MRC is positively portrayed in both MRC managed and shared laboratory areas, but also that:

- Good work practices are in place to protect users, colleagues and visitors.
- That any potential hazard or risk is controlled to an acceptable level that protects not only those in the laboratory area but the environment, the community and family, whether this contact is direct or indirect.
- That experimental data is sound, recorded and archived properly.
The MRC Code of Good Health and Safety Practice

Good health and safety practice combines safe working practices and a common sense approach to activities within a laboratory and other work areas. A number of issues should be considered and these are outlined in the following paragraphs.

Personal Care

- Outdoor clothing

  External outdoor clothing, such as jackets and coats, should not be worn or stored within the laboratory area. This will allow you to avoid the possibility of contaminating outdoor clothing with noxious chemicals or any biological agent. This measure will also ensure that contamination, whether chemical, biological or radiological is not carried home on your outdoor clothing.

- Eating, drinking and the storage and preparation of food and beverages are not allowed within the laboratory area. Cosmetics must not be applied within the laboratory area.

- Hand care is an area that is often neglected by those working within laboratories. It is particularly important to ensure good hand care if you are wearing protective gloves for any process during your work. Hands should be rinsed and carefully dried after protective gloves are removed. Hands should be washed and dried before leaving the laboratory or work area. Good emollient creams should be used at the end of each working day to ensure that natural oils that may be lost during work activity are replaced. This will help to ensure that your skin remains an effective barrier to external agents.

- Long hair should be tied back.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Personal protective equipment is for your own use. In any situation where PPE is in direct contact with the skin of the individual (e.g. safety spectacles, gloves, ear protectors) or could be potentially exposed to airborne contaminating materials (e.g. laboratory coat), it must not be shared. Where PPE is shared, for example thermal gloves, UV face shields and face visors, it must be well maintained and cleaned or washed regularly.

Personal code:

- You must wear your laboratory coat when working in the laboratory. Laboratory coats are provided for your protection. You should remove your laboratory coat immediately if you spill anything hazardous on it. You should ensure your laboratory coat is autoclaved before washing if contaminated with hazard group 2 or 3 biological agents or equivalent classes of genetically modified agents. You must not leave the laboratory suite/areas wearing or carrying your laboratory coat.

- Suitable eye protection is provided for you and you must wear it unless the risk assessment determines it is not a requirement.
• You must wear suitable hand protection gloves (disposable or otherwise) where the risk assessment determines the need. You must however remove the gloves before using any communal equipment such as computer keyboards, telephones, etc. that are regarded as ‘clean’ and must remove them when opening doors. In some defined circumstances a ‘one-glove’ rule can operate. Remember that gloves are normally the primary barrier to protect your hands from contamination by a chemical, radiological or biological agent. It is recognised that for some tasks such as the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) wearing gloves may be to protect your experiment from environmental contamination. Nevertheless, hand care in this situation must not be neglected.

• You must wear suitable footwear at all times in the laboratory area. This is regarded as low heeled, closed toe footwear made of suitable material e.g. leather. Open-toed sandals are not suitable footwear in any laboratory environment. Specialised footwear may also be required for example, in a machining workshop, stores, dispensing cryogenic liquids, cold rooms or catering facilities.

• You must only wear your PPE within the work area and you should not normally wear it in public areas. You must not wear PPE where any food or drink is being consumed or in offices and/or libraries.

Complementary principles:

• In the case of chemical spillages, radiological, or biological contamination, the laboratory coat will be the primary barrier. Dedicated laboratory coats must be used for particular tasks. For example, a side-fastened and cuffed laboratory coat (Howie) or similar design is appropriate when working in a tissue culture suite or wherever there is the risk of contamination of the upper chest area. A dedicated gown may be more appropriate for working with hazard group 2 or 3 biological agents.

• Where the autoclave is located outside the suite, contaminated coats must be transported to the autoclave in suitable rigid and covered containers. Laboratory coats must be provided for visitors to the laboratory.

• Laboratory coats should be washed at regular intervals. Used and/or contaminated laboratory coats may not be removed from the laboratory suite unless made free of contamination, or when transported in suitable secure containers for decontamination by an approved method.

• Other than the occasions where the risk assessment determines there is no need for eye protection, the assessment should also specify which eye protection, i.e., spectacles, goggles or a face shield should be used for a particular task. The suitability of wearing contact lenses for certain tasks should not be forgotten when eye protection is being considered as they can hinder flushing contaminants from the eye.

• The need for protective gloves must be considered in all risk assessments. In most situations it will be a requirement. The assessment should always go further, stating the appropriate type of glove required. The risk assessment will determine if any surfaces or objects can be regarded as ‘clean’. This will not be the case in many laboratories, for example, most containment level 2 laboratories and any containment level 3 laboratories.
The risk assessment will determine the need for special footwear e.g. re-enforced toe, non-slip sole, chemical resistance, etc.

If the risk assessment recommends that respiratory protection (RPE) should be worn to prevent or control exposure to airborne hazards then this should be face-fit tested to the user. Each worker should be provided with their own RPE.

Where the risk assessment identifies the need for PPE, then the correct type of protection must be determined, assessed for suitability and compatibility and the users must be trained in its use, storage and maintenance. The PPE must then be used, stored and maintained correctly.

The need for other personal protective measures such as ear defenders or hard hats will be determined by the risk assessment.

Casual visitors must not enter laboratory areas.

**Housekeeping**

The risk of ill-health, accidents and emergencies can be reduced by ensuring that the working environment is kept clean and tidy.

- Spills should be cleaned up immediately. You should be familiar with the spillage procedures in your Unit.
- Corridors and walkways within rooms should be kept free from obstruction. You should not store bags on the floor by your feet.
- Take care to ensure that electrical leads do not pose a trip hazards and are protected from damage.
- If you work in a laboratory you should ensure that your papers and files are kept in a separate area to your ‘wet’ working area. Benches should be cleaned and, if necessary, disinfected after each task.
- Laboratory materials taken from storage areas should be returned as soon as the task is complete.
- The minimum quantities of hazardous substances should be out on the bench or in fume hoods, safety cabinets, etc., during experimental procedures.
- All waste should be assigned to the correct waste containers and non-contaminated waste should be recycled where possible. Do not allow waste to build up, as it could pose a health or fire hazard.
Induction Training

Units must have in place an induction programme for new arrivals.

Short term visitors

This includes those visiting the unit for one week or less. The question of what should be addressed will vary, but should always include information on emergency procedures. The health, safety and welfare of the visitor must be addressed, regardless of the length of stay, nature and reason for the visit.
Long term visitors

Included here would be new members of staff, students (e.g. PhD and MSc) and visiting workers for more than a week’s duration. A typical induction programme contains information on the following:

- Emergency procedures
- Accident reporting system
- Building familiarisation
- Welfare facilities
- MRC corporate structure
- Unit line management structure
- Unit local rules including the health and safety policy
- Relevant work hazards and control measures (risk assessments, SOPs etc)

The list above is not exhaustive.

Work related training

Units must ensure that staff, students and visiting workers are trained to such a level that ensures “competency” in the nature of the task that is being undertaken. Training records must be maintained, signed by trainee and trainer and filed appropriately. In some instances training records may need to be kept for 40 years.

Refresher training may be required for certain roles and tasks e.g. work with radiation, DSE assessors, first-aid trained staff etc.

Behavioural Risk

What is a behavioural risk? One definition would be working or acting in a way or manner that could bring you, your colleagues or others who may be affected by your actions at risk of injury or illness. Examples of behavioural risks include poor or lack of labelling on reagents and waste, placing sharps in clinical waste bags, failing to clear up a spillage thus leaving contamination for others, horseplay etc.

Under management discretion the use of radios in shared areas may be allowed but noise levels should be limited to avoid disturbing others. The use of personal headphones for mp3 players is not permitted within the laboratory or work area. The effect of using headphones not only limits a person’s hearing capability but also isolates them from the world around them. This could lead to not hearing someone’s call for help or warning and could also mean that an individual’s spatial awareness and perception of neighbouring activities is diminished, making them more likely to bump into others or equipment.

The use of mobile phones within the laboratory or work area should be strongly discouraged. They may not be used in high containment areas unless they are specified within an emergency plan for personal safety and security. Even so they should be used with caution, be kept as far as possible free from contamination and only used with clean gloves. Any mobile phone used in these areas must never leave the containment laboratory unless properly decontaminated.
Movement within the laboratory environment should be purposeful and careful. Avoid running and other rapid movements that could lead to harm to others or spills or loss of material or damage to equipment.

Flasks and bottles should never be carried by the neck alone but should always be supported from beneath or transported in a carry-box.

Each employee has a personal responsibility to demonstrate the standards set in this document as an example to others. This includes the wearing of laboratory coats, eye protection and gloves as specified.

Check equipment for damage and safe operation before use.

Do not use equipment unless you have been shown how to use it safely.

Failure to comply with requirements of this Code may result in the MRC Disciplinary procedure being invoked.
Supplementary Guidance

Health Issues

Some health concerns have possible safety implications. Personal health issues should be discussed with your GP and/or with the Occupational Health Physician in line with the MRC Health Promotion policy and Sickness Absence policy. Where you have major personal concerns about “being fit for the job”, then it makes sense to have private discussions with your immediate line manager or a senior manager about your situation. Similarly, if your manager has these concerns he/she may wish to discuss this with you on a one-to-one basis.

Medical conditions or medication regimes that affect your immune status may increase the risks to your health in some laboratory environments. Persons who suffer from allergies may be more at risk in working environments where there is a risk of accidental exposure to known chemical or biological sensitisers.

It is appreciated that health issues may well be of a confidential nature; however, some conditions can affect performance and a lapse in concentration can lead to incidents that may affect your own personal safety and that of others. Further support with health issues can be gained from Occupational Health and the Employee Assistance Programme.

The MRC is committed to protecting the health and safety of its pregnant workers. Although not normally a health problem as such, the workplace may have risks which can affect the health and safety of expectant mothers and their child. Ergonomics, such as the use of computing equipment and manual handling issues all need to be considered during and immediately after pregnancy. If you are pregnant, your manager should arrange for a risk assessment to be carried out in line with the Maternity, Adoptive, Paternity and Parental leave policy. Advice should be sought if you have any concerns. It is acceptable for the individual to consult the Occupational Health service provider directly in confidence either in relation to a pregnancy or if she is planning to become pregnant. However, it must also be part of the service level agreement with the provider that the provider provides feedback to line management if the consultation reveals there may be any additional risks to the individual in the workplace that require additional controls.

Life style issues such as alcohol and drug problems or stress should not be regarded lightly since both may affect work activity, performance and safety. The MRC health promotion policy provides guidance on dealing with such issues in the workplace. Advice and help must be sought to prevent serious upsets in both your professional and private life.

All accidents should be reportable since the MRC has a “no threshold” rule for accident reporting. This is particularly important when dealing with biological or toxic agents. Non-injury incident reporting is also encouraged particularly when the performance of equipment and the safety of individuals are concerned. All staff, students and visiting workers should be aware of both the accident and emergency provision. MRC has an “online” system for reporting accidents.

More detailed information on the policies referred to in this document can be found at the corporate health, safety and security web site.

The address is http://www.mrc.ac.uk/hss Can you check this web site, please

The MRC HR policies can be assessed through the Corporate HR section on the MRC Portal.

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Corporate Safety, Security and Resilience
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