

Laboratory Safety Advocate Program

University of Tennessee Safety Program LS-005

Document Contact: EHS-Lab Safety

Date effective: April 19, 2021

Revision Date: June 21, 2021

Purpose

The laboratory safety advocate (LSA) program is a robust network of departmental and unit representatives who advocate for and facilitate a positive safety culture. This document establishes the roles and responsibilities associated with the LSA program.

Scope and Applicability

The LSA program shall apply to all UTK departments and other organizational units (e.g. centers and institutes) that conduct research, academic instruction, or other activities in laboratories, maker spaces, studios and academic shops ('laboratories' hereafter).

The adoption and implementation of the LSA program at the UT Institute of Agriculture (UTIA) will be at the discretion of UTIA administration.

Abbreviations and Definitions

Abbreviations

EHS: Environmental Health and Safety

LSA: Laboratory Safety Advocate

LSC: Laboratory Safety Committee

UTIA: University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture

UTK: University of Tennessee Knoxville (Main Campus)

Definitions

Laboratory: Wet or dry laboratory, maker space, studio, or academic shop, individually or in combination, where research, academic instruction, or related activities are conducted.

Unit: Department, center, institute, or other organizational entity served by an LSA.

Roles and Responsibilities

EHS Department

EHS, in partnership with the Laboratory Safety Committee (LSC), associate deans for research, and unit leadership, is responsible for implementing, informing, and maintaining the LSA program. EHS will:

- a. Maintain a current LSA roster.
- b. Maintain written procedures, records, and other documentation for the LSA program.
- c. Provide programmatic training, regulatory awareness, and technical guidance to LSAs.

- d. Establish and maintain communication methods to inform and update LSAs, including: safety & compliance requirements, reminders, and updates; technical bulletins; near misses and lessons learned; training and events announcements; and important information that may affect the laboratory community.
- e. Provide electronic templates, forms, or similar tools to support the LSA program, as necessary.
- f. Prepare and assist with laboratory commissioning and decommissioning procedures.
- g. Review and revise the LSA program as it evolves.

Laboratory Safety Committee

The LSC, in partnership with EHS, is responsible for implementing, informing, and maintaining the LSA program. The LSC will:

- a. Ensure that all assigned LSAs are appointed to the committee and receive committee-related communications on a regular basis.
- b. Evaluate the broad needs for sustaining an effective LSA program and make recommendations to EHS and, if necessary, to the campus administration.
- c. Serve as a forum to review, discuss, and advise on laboratory safety practices, accidents/incidents/near misses, laboratory safety reviews, unit (department, institute, or center) safety summaries, regulatory updates, or other topics that may impact LSAs and the units that they serve.
- d. Collaborate with other committees, including but not limited to the Campus Safety Committee, the Institutional Biosafety Committee, the Animal Care and Use Committee, Laser Safety Committee and Radiation Safety Committee, to ensure that the LSA program is well-informed on safety and compliance expectations.

Associate Dean for Research

The associate dean will:

- a. Collaborate with EHS, unit leaders, and LSAs in the college to sustain and improve laboratory safety.
- b. Initiate and support college-level efforts related to safety culture in coordination with the college dean.
- c. Engage unit leaders as appropriate to continue and/or develop new approaches for improving laboratory safety, particularly when initiated by the unit leaders.
- d. Host regular meetings each year with LSAs to discuss and resolve matters related to their work, their status, safety-related incidents and near misses, college and unit initiatives to improve safety, and/or updates/improvements related to ongoing processes such as laboratory site safety visits or unit-level student-led safety committees.

Unit Leadership

The department head, or institute/center director, will:

- a. Appoint, empower, and support the unit's LSA. Considerations for appointing the LSA include:
 - Possessing one or more of the following attributes: 1) professional seniority, 2) professional rapport with unit faculty, 3) familiarity with, or training on, departmental operations, and/or 3) technical knowledge in one or more of the unit's disciplines.
 - Sufficient time allocation to fulfill the LSA programmatic responsibilities (see below). Time allocations are at the discretion of unit leadership and may vary depending on LSA status (faculty, staff, etc.).

- LSA-related services are necessary year-round. LSAs that are on a 9-month appointment should receive compensation to support their efforts in non-appointed months (e.g. during the summer and/or winter terms). Alternatively, units may designate a proxy LSA who can fulfill the associated duties when the primary LSA is away.
 - More than one LSA may be appointed per unit if necessary, provided that the unit leader ensures all roles and responsibilities are addressed and that parallel efforts maintain comprehensive coverage.
- b. Work with the LSA to ensure that unit laboratory safety obligations are prioritized and addressed, including active participation of laboratory groups and leaders in laboratory site safety visits.
 - c. Provide unit-specific methods for the LSA to communicate laboratory safety announcements (e.g. unit email distribution list, faculty meetings, etc.).
 - d. Inform the LSA of any unit laboratory safety needs or concerns that need to be discussed with EHS and/or the LSC.

Laboratory Safety Advocate

The LSA is appointed by unit leadership to assist the unit in attaining and maintaining a proactive and positive safety culture. To support that primary objective, the LSA will:

- a. Disseminate and communicate safety information from EHS and the LSC to personnel in the unit as needed, including pertinent procedures, guidelines, hazard inventory requests, training requirements, or safety bulletins.
- b. Work with academic or research faculty and staff in resolving safety questions or raising concerns to appropriate authorities.
- c. Work with responsible academic or research faculty to ensure that potential safety hazards, exposures, accidents, injuries, illnesses, spills, releases, near misses, or other regulatory and environmental issues are reported to EHS, the LSC, and other relevant safety committees.
- d. Liaise laboratory commissioning and/or decommissioning by notifying EHS and the appropriate associate dean of their college whenever:
 - New PIs or researchers join the department, institute, or center
 - PIs or researchers leave the department, institute, or center
 - PIs or researchers will be relocating their lab(s)
- e. Partner with EHS in incident/accident/near miss investigations, and convey investigation reports and lessons-learned to department/institute/center and college stakeholders.
- f. Represent the unit at scheduled LSC and college meetings (as applicable). As appropriate, discuss safety concerns, incidents, remedial actions, lessons-learned, or best practices.
- g. Serve on subcommittees or workgroups to address LSC safety initiatives (e.g. reviewing/revising lab safety-related plans & procedures, benchmarking best practices, etc.).
- h. Provide (or coordinate) technical or subject matter expertise for EHS or the LSC as necessary.
- i. Partner with unit leadership to establish unit-specific safety objectives. These objectives will be communicated and discussed with EHS prior to final adoption.
- j. Advocate for a strong safety culture by promoting safety and acting as a positive role model.

Recordkeeping

LSA program documents will be kept by EHS as appropriate.

Training and Information

LSA orientation will be provided by EHS. The training will include an overview of this program document, relevant laboratory safety standards and guidelines, and other supporting information as necessary. Training documentation will be maintained by EHS.

References

[Charter and Bylaws of the UTK Laboratory Safety Committee](#)

Appendices

None.

Disclaimer

The information provided in these guidelines is designed for educational use only and is not a substitute for specific training or experience.

The University of Tennessee Knoxville and the authors of these guidelines assume no liability for any individual's use of or reliance upon any material contained or referenced herein. The material contained in these guidelines may not be the most current.

This material may be freely distributed for nonprofit educational use. However, if included in publications, written or electronic, attributions must be made to the author. Commercial use of this material is prohibited without express written permission from the author.