Laboratory safety might not be something scientists think about every day, but it's among the most important factors every researcher must take into account prior to conducting experiments.

UA chemical safety manager Richard Wagner helped spearhead a method to streamline and simplify lab safety management on campus, allowing scientists to focus more of their time on research, while providing a one-stop resource for safety and compliance information.

The recently launched Chemical Safety Database/Datasystems project is housed within the UA's Research Laboratory & Safety Services [1] department, which serves the UA, Banner ? University Medical Center [2] and various regulatory, research, clinical and educational units around the state.

To date, more than 50 labs across the UA campus are using the resource to enter their respective chemical, radiation or biological data into the system and ensure they are meeting all state and federal safety regulations.

"This certainly beats the old method of entering data into outdated spreadsheets or making copies of safety data forms and sliding them under lab doors," Wagner said. "This keeps all the information in a secure, centralized place and normalizes the process by which we update our safety protocols."

Wagner, who has been at the UA for nearly two decades, put a similar system in place for radioactive materials in 2000. Wagner established an online database with open software that allowed anyone who worked with radiation control to log compliance data.

When UA senior vice president for research Kimberly Espy found out about this program in 2012, she asked Wagner to consolidate this information for radiation, chemical and biological safety.

Espy, who serves on the Task Force on Laboratory Safety created by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities to enhance laboratory safety on university campuses, made this initiative one of her department's top priorities.

"One of our core values at the UA is to conduct our cutting-edge research in a safe and effective manner," Epsy said. "A commitment to excellence and a commitment to safety go hand in hand."

Wagner, along with UA chemical safety coordinator Sukeshi Mehta and chemical safety technician John Lorenzen, started the Office of Radiation, Chemical & Biological Safety to provide database access and training for researchers. There are currently more than 77,000 different chemicals listed in the database that adhere to the globally harmonized standard and
coding rubrics established by the Occupational Safety & Health Administration [3].

"Our database looks at these codes and classifies the chemicals, allowing researchers to make a specific safety plan for their labs," Wagner said.

Once a principal investigator has filled out the proper paperwork and completed the necessary training, all he or she needs to access this wealth of information is a UA NetID. These unified access portals make it simpler for researchers campus-wide to access the same safety regulations and standard operating procedures.

"It's Dr. Espy's vision to give our researchers a common portal and a common information source," Wagner said. "Very few institutions have a resource this detailed on a university-wide scale."

Source URL: https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/ua-streamlines-lab-safety-protocols

Links