A. PURPOSE

Unattended laboratory operations pose an increased risk of fire, leaks, hazardous material release or other incident. The purpose of this Policy is to discourage, and thereby reduce the number of incidents related to, the unattended operation of laboratory equipment or processes, particularly those involving hazardous materials.

B. APPLICABILITY/SCOPE

All persons employed by or working on behalf of the University who operate laboratory equipment must strictly adhere to this Policy.

C. DEFINITIONS

Unattended laboratory operations – any condition in a laboratory, research support space, or common area of campus not under the direct, line-of-sight supervision or periodic observation of a designated staff member. This may include, but is not limited to, experiments that require running water and drainage, automated agitation or stirring, or those that are performed at elevated temperature for extended periods.

Hazardous condition – any fire, water leak, hazardous materials release, or uncontrolled condition that may result from failure of an unattended laboratory operation or supporting infrastructure.

D. PROCEDURES

When unattended laboratory operations are necessary, the laboratory shall design the experiment so as to prevent a hazardous condition, including fire, leaks, hazardous materials release, or other incident, from developing if an unattended laboratory operation, or infrastructure supporting that unattended laboratory operation, were to fail. The laboratory must ensure that:

1. All susceptible failure/leak points, such as flexible hose connections, are secure.
2. Electrical and other connections pose minimal risk of failure.
3. Proper drainage or secondary containment for operations requiring running water or other continuously flowing liquids is provided.
4. Other conditions that may pose a hazard while unattended are addressed.
5. Shut-down procedures for safely terminating the experiment or process are established, posted if possible, and understood by all lab members.

E. RESPONSIBILITIES

It is the responsibility of the laboratory to design and operate experiments so as to prevent a hazardous condition, including fire, leaks, hazardous materials release, or other incident, from developing if an unattended laboratory operation or infrastructure supporting that unattended laboratory operation were to fail.

F. EMERGENCY CONTACTS
The laboratory shall post a sign on the exterior of any area (i.e. laboratory entrance door) describing any unattended laboratory operation that might cause a hazardous condition if there is an experimental equipment or building services failure. The sign must include:

1. At least two 24-hour contact phone numbers for the laboratory.
2. A list of materials and/or processes (i.e. chemicals, potentially infectious material, radioactive material, compressed gases, electricity, etc) that could be expected to cause a hazardous condition if there is an experimental equipment or building services failure.

A sign template is included in Section K of this Policy.

All after-hour emergencies must be reported to Public Safety.

Medical Center: (212) 305-7979
Morningside and Nevis: (212) 854-5555
Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory (LDEO): (845) 365-8822

G. CROSS REFERENCES
N/A

H. MEDICAL SURVEILLANCE
N/A

I. RECORDKEEPING
The laboratory may notify EH&S when a new unattended laboratory operation begins. It is recommended that the laboratory e-mail a copy of the door sign to labsafety@columbia.edu to complete this notification.

J. APPENDICES
N/A

K. FORMS
Unattended Laboratory Operations Door Sign

L. REFERENCES

M. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
N/A

*Environmental Health & Safety*