

Introduction

There have been several laboratory incidents and near misses involving chemicals at The University of Melbourne. Occasionally a root cause associated with these incidents has been the absence of a risk assessment and the subsequent lack of appropriate controls. The scope of this bulletin is to provide information on triggers that should initiate a risk assessment being undertaken prior to a chemical activity.

Key Regulatory Requirements

The Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic) requires employers, so far as reasonably practicable, to provide a safe workplace. The Australian Standard AS 2243.2 (Safety in laboratories, Part 2: Chemical aspects, Section 3.3.1.2) provides information on hazard identification, risk assessment and control processes. When developing and reviewing a risk assessment, staff and students should review all resources. Detailed guidance can be found in the University [Chemical Management Guidelines](#). For the University's general Risk Management framework, refer to [Risk Management](#). The Dangerous Goods (Storage and Handling) Regulations 2012 (Vic) prescribe the storage arrangements for all dangerous goods. Also refer to [Dangerous Goods](#) for additional information.

Trigger Points

Triggers indicate that an adverse incident may occur. They can prompt a chemical user to undertake a risk assessment prior to the activity.

Triggers can be identified by consulting with staff and students undertaking or about to undertake a chemical activity. Consultation may include questions such as:

- How would they know an issue is occurring?
- How would they know when the issue had occurred?

From questions like this you can work backwards from the issue to determine how you could identify the possibility of an adverse incident before it has started.

Triggers for chemical risk assessments include:

- a new process is being initiated
- new staff or students are working in the laboratory
- a new chemical is being used
- the chemical process has changed
- the properties of the chemical changes with time
- the chemical is toxic
- the chemical is dangerous
- the chemical changes during a process
- the chemical exposure limits are low
- spilling the chemical could result in a serious incident
- changes in Legislation or local provisions

