

University of Galway, Health and Safety Office

Shared Facilities - Guidance for their Safe Management

University of Galway like many Universities operates a range of shared facilities that are made available to staff and students from a number of Units and also external personnel.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 recognises the challenges of safely managing such a shared workplace in Section 20 where the Act specifies the need for co-operation, co-ordination and information.

Within University of Galway shared facilities include major “user” research facilities and smaller shared facilities such as stores. In addition, instruments in many Principal Investigator labs are often used by staff and students from other labs. The safety management of such shared facilities poses challenges that are not encountered in dedicated PI labs. The manager of the shared facility is not the supervisor or advisor of users from other groups and there has been some confusion concerning the question of who is responsible for ensuring training and supervision of those users.

It is the manager of an instrument who must, without exception, insure that anyone using that instrument has been trained appropriately and will use it safely. No staff member or student may use an instrument in any lab until the manager of that instrument has reviewed the relevant safety issues and has formally approved its use.

Thus, the individual researcher, the supervising PI, and the manager of the shared facility are all, in their own way, responsible for ensuring the training and safety of people working in the lab.

Main hazards:

The main safety issues with shared facilities are as follows:

1. Managing who has access to the facility.
2. The changing population of users and ensuring that they are adequately trained.
3. The potential crossover in activities by those who may wish to use a specialist shared facility.
4. Risks not being managed as responsibilities unclear or collective responsibility assumed but not effectively discharged.

Risk Prevention/Reduction:

The primary risk reduction measure in these circumstances is to identify a competent person who is unambiguously in charge of the facility. This means that responsibility for risk assessment can be assigned and the Unit Safety Statement can address the necessary safety arrangements for work in the facility.

Persons in charge of particular activities which use such a facility remain responsible for the risk assessment and management of their own activities.

In risk assessing such facilities, it ensures that the safe management of such shared spaces is properly set out whereas otherwise it may be too vague.

For such shared facilities, the risk assessment needs to be discussed with other users and stakeholders. It needs to properly set out who is responsible for the specific controls required. In addition the risk assessment needs to include what extra controls are needed by virtue of the space being shared e.g. for a chemical store - restricted access, rules on what can/cannot be stored, periodic audits, regular clear outs.

Once completed the risk assessment must be made available to all users so that the various hazards and controls are known by all relevant personnel.

Persons Responsible:

Heads of Units

Principal Investigators

Resources: <http://www.eposters.net/pdfs/safety-management-in-multidisciplinary-shared-facilities-with-facility-online-manager-r.pdf>