Faculty Session: Safety

January 11, 2016

Problem: Safety is viewed as outside the mission and culture of academic institutions. The consequence has been a number of injuries and near-misses, as well as some highly-publicized disfigurements and deaths.

Action Plan: In the next month, the AAU and APLU, cosigned by the chancellor of UCLA (where a lab accident led to a death in 2008) will send out a proactive call to University Presidents and Chancellors to renew commitment to safety and provide them with a list of 20 recommendations as well as a tool kit for their implementation.

Discussion:

How should administrators, who may feel that safety is below their consideration, be informed and involved? One solution voiced is to have legal counsel inform them.

The importance of personalization, using movies and online methods to make clear the consequences of unsafe behavior clear was pointed out. This provides a mechanism to relate the series of dry rules and regulations that are followed to clear outcomes if they are not.

It is important to have institutional buy-in to ensure that the University provides the resources needed to make the space safe to do the proposed research. For this purpose, administrators must have a broad appreciation of the chemical and physical hazards present on campus.

Some institutions, particularly UC campuses, are focusing lectures on how not to get sued. This can be a useful method to get faculty to pay attention.

20 recommendations and tool kit for their implementation (see powerpoint presentation)

#1 Get chancellor or president to renew commitment to improve safety and provide them information (tool kit) on how to do so.

#2 Create a designated campus lead for safety, along with committees for safety that include faculty, EH&S and other representatives that can act as partners.

Example: University of Minnesota Chemistry and Chemical Engineering students and faculty have developed guidelines to get students engaged in safety, such as the “safety minute” incorporated into seminars.

#3 Have campus dialogs with stakeholders to create a vision of safety and create policies and procedures. A discussion ensued regarding training programs that cover too much that is not relevant. It is important to personalize safety training. A management system should be developed to identify what training is needed. OEHS should be used as a consultant to ask the questions.

Comment: Safety training is archaic. We need engaging, modern approaches, including flipped classrooms.

Suggestion: Ask students to be the experts and propose and defend their experimental procedures, as they are at the front line. Discuss with relevant parties (faculty, OEHS)

#4 Create a recognition and reward system for safe practices that is integrated into the tenure & promotion, hiring, and annual performance reviews. Include letters of non-compliance as well as commendations for good compliance.

#5 Establish an assessment process

#6 Identify the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders.

#7 Establish a unified administrative reporting model

#8 Embed safety communication at all levels. Make it academically normal to talk about safety, and discuss it during research seminars.

#9 Establish a trusting and safe environment and encourage open dialog

A discussion ensued regarding how to discuss safety in light of health changes, revealed or otherwise, such as pregnancy. One approach is to provide students with a list of chemicals and procedures and invite them to discuss them with their physician, offering to make any needed accommodation (exposing risks). If the student feels there are actions they cannot perform, have an undergraduate work with them to do the necessary functions. Have industrial speakers discuss the importance of safety culture in industry, so that students demand this kind of training and this kind of culture from their department.

Meeting ended. The remaining 11 recommendations will be provided as a powerpoint presentation.

Summarized by Stephanie L. Brock