

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON  
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND RISK MANAGEMENT**

**SECTION: RADIATION, CHEMICAL, AND BIOLOGICAL SAFETY**

**SUBJECT: Reproductive Health**

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**PURPOSE**

This procedure addresses reproductive health for students, faculty, and staff who work in labs and other areas using radiation sources, chemicals, biologicals and other potentially teratogenic agents at the University of Houston. It applies to the entire university community and includes all persons who use or may come into contact with agents that may present a reproductive health hazard.

**POLICY**

The University of Houston requires that all users of reproductive health hazard agents on the campus receive necessary safety training and be informed of their rights and responsibilities pertaining to such substances. Users must be authorized by the appropriate safety committee and the Environmental Health and Risk Management Department as required, and comply with all federal, state, and university regulations pertaining to the safe use of such materials.

**DEFINITIONS**

Agent - Substance that produces an effect.

Embryotoxin - Agent that causes a toxic effect on an embryo by exposure of the pregnant female during the period of tissue differentiation and/or organogenesis.

Fetotoxin - Agent that causes a degenerative effect on already formed fetal tissues and organs.

Mutagen - A substance that induces mutation in a genetic material.

Reproductive Health Hazard – A chemical, physical or biological agent that causes reproductive impairment in adults or developmental impairment or death in the embryo/fetus or child.

Reproductive Toxin - An agent that interferes with reproductive or procreative functioning of the adult from puberty through adulthood.

Teratogen - an agent that interferes with embryonic or fetal development or causes physical defects in offspring.

## RESPONSIBILITIES

### *Safety Committees*

The University of Houston safety committees are charged with the responsibility of advising the senior administrators about safety hazards.

#### Specific Responsibilities:

Provide technical expertise to university facilities using reproductive health hazards.

Investigate possible improper use and enforce any necessary code requirements.

Ensure the safe use of potentially hazardous materials by requiring job-specific training, issuing authorizations, and by prohibiting use when necessary.

Ensure that the university's safety programs are in compliance with applicable state and federal regulations.

### *Environmental Health and Risk Management Department*

The Environmental Health and Risk Management Department acts as the operational functionary for the safety committees and the university community.

#### Specific Responsibilities:

Advise the safety committees about all reproductive health hazards and make recommendations for appropriate safeguards.

Generate policies and procedures for the protection of all individuals from potential reproductive health hazards.

Disseminate information on reproductive health hazards and provide general safety training.

Inspect as necessary university laboratory facilities for reproductive health hazards.

Provide a Reproductive Health Program for the university and maintain records as required.

### *Principal Investigators and Authorized Users*

Principal Investigators and Authorized Users are responsible for working safely with materials that are reproductive health hazards and following all applicable policies, procedures, and regulations.

#### Specific Responsibilities:

Work safely using good work practices with reproductive health hazards.

Report all incidents involving reproductive health agents to the Environmental Health and Risk Management Department.

Ensure attendance of reproductive health hazards safety training.

Maintain compliance with all applicable university, state, and federal regulations.

## INFORMATION

There is limited knowledge about the reproductive effects of most chemicals. There is almost no human data and very little animal data available regarding the reproductive effects of chemicals and physical agents. This makes the task of assessing the reproductive health hazard potential of these agents difficult. It is also important to distinguish between the ability of a chemical or physical agent to cause reproductive effects and the real hazard in the workplace.

Hazard is a function of the toxicity of the material and the dose resulting in the work environment. Exposure is dependent upon the concentration level of the material in the environment and the duration of exposure to the material by the worker. Any material, even one with a high toxicity, that is effectively controlled in the workplace so there is little exposure, presents a low hazard potential. Therefore, the use of engineering controls, administrative controls and safe work practices, and personal protective equipment can all be used to prevent exposure and minimize the hazard.

In the United States, decisions regarding the reproductive health hazards of employees must be made in accordance with the U. S. Supreme Court decision in the Johnson Controls case. This decision prohibits management from reassigning employees to remove them from an exposed environment. That decision must be left to the employee after they have been provided sufficient information to make an informed decision.

## REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

A reproductive health program provides safety training to workers and evaluation of work environments for chemical or physical agents which may affect male or female reproductive systems or the developing fetus. It provides guidance for advising workers of this information and assisting them in making an informed decision whether to continue working in a particular job.

### Training

Provide information to all workers about the potential for reproductive health hazards including the Material Data Safety Sheet supplied by the chemical manufacturer.

Specific training will be provided through Hazard Communication training, the Individual Laboratory Safety Program, and the Radiation Safety Courses.

Reproductive Health Hazards Minimization Steps

Engineering Controls

Administration controls and safe practices

Personal Protective Equipment

Work Environment Exposure Evaluation

Laboratory Safety Program efforts

Specific requests

Recordkeeping

Chemical and physical agents inventory

Evaluation results

Medical records