**Water-Reactive Chemicals Guidance**

The following information is intended to provide general guidance on how to safely work with a specific class of chemical or hazard. This information is generic in nature. It addresses the use and handling of substances by hazard class only.

Water-Reactive chemicals are chemicals that react vigorously with moisture. The most common water-reactive chemicals include sodium, potassium, lithium metals and aluminum alkyls.

**Securing of gas cylinders**

Not applicable

**Decontamination procedures**

* **Personnel:** Wash hands and arms with soap and water immediately after handling Water-Reactive Chemicals.
* **Area:** Carefully clean work area after use.

**Designated area**

Not applicable

**Emergency procedure**

Emergency procedures which address response actions to fires, explosions, spills, injury to staff, should be developed by each laboratory. The procedures should address as a minimum the following:

* **Who to contact:** (University police, Principal investigator of the laboratory including evening phone number and Office of Environmental Health Safety)
* The location of all safety equipment (showers, spill equipment, eye wash, fire extinguishers, etc.)
* The location of all Water-Reactive Chemicals in the laboratory
* The method used to alert personnel in nearby areas of potential hazards
* Special first aid treatment required by the type of Water-Reactive chemicals handled in the laboratory

**Fume hood**

Many water-reactive chemicals will liberate hydrogen when they react with water. The use of a fume hood is recommended to prevent the buildup of combustible gases.

**Glove (dry) box**

A glove box may be used to handle water-reactive chemicals when a dry atmosphere is required.

**Hazard assessment**

Hazard assessment of work involving water-reactive chemicals should address proper use and handling techniques, fire safety (including the need for Class D fire extinguishers), storage, water reactivity, and waste disposal issues.

**Protective apparel**

Lab coats, closed toed shoes and long sleeved clothing should be worn when handling water-reactive chemicals. Additional protective clothing should be worn if the possibility of skin contact is likely.

The Principal Investigator/Course Director is responsible to the select the appropriate chemical resistant glove when direct or prolonged contact with hazardous chemicals is anticipated.

The Office of Environmental Health and Safety is available to provide guidance.

**Eye protection**

Eye protection in the form of safety glasses must be worn at all times when handling water-reactive chemicals. Ordinary (street) prescription glasses do not provide adequate protection. (Contrary to popular opinion these glasses cannot pass the rigorous test for industrial safety glasses.) Adequate safety glasses must meet the requirements of the American Standard Practice for Occupational and Educational Eye and Face Protection (ANSI/ISEA Z87.1-2010) and must be equipped with side shields. Safety glasses with side shields do not provide adequate protection from splashes; therefore, when the potential for splash hazard exists other eye protection and/or face protection must be worn.

The Principal Investigator/Course Director is responsible to the select the appropriate eye protection.

The Office of Environmental Health and Safety is available to provide guidance.

**Gloves**

Gloves should be worn when handling water-reactive chemicals. Disposable nitrile gloves provide adequate protection against accidental hand contact with small quantities of most laboratory chemicals.

The Principal Investigator is responsible to select the appropriate chemical resistant glove when direct or prolonged contact with hazardous chemicals is anticipated.

The Office of Environmental Health and Safety is available to provide guidance.

**Safety shielding**

Safety shielding is required any time there is a risk of explosion, splash hazard or a highly exothermic reaction. All manipulations of water-reactive chemicals which pose this risk should occur in a fume hood with the sash in the lowest feasible position. Portable shields, which provide protection to all laboratory occupants, are acceptable.

The Principal Investigator is responsible to the select the appropriate shielding exposure is anticipated.

The Office of Environmental Health and Safety is available to provide guidance.

**Eyewash**

Where the eyes or body of any person may be exposed to water-reactive chemicals, suitable facilities for quick drenching or flushing of the eyes and body shall be provided within the work area for immediate emergency use. Bottle type eyewash stations are not acceptable.

**Safety shower**

A safety or drench shower should be available in a nearby location where the water-reactive chemicals is used.

**Signs and labels**

**Containers:** All water reactive chemicals chemical must be clearly labeled with the correct chemical name, health hazard and CAS#. Handwritten labels are acceptable; chemical formulas and structural formulas are not acceptable. Chemical containers must be dated upon receipt as well as when opened.

**Special storage**

Water-reactive chemicals should be stored in a cool and dry location. Keep water sensitive chemicals segregated from all other chemicals in the laboratory. Minimize the quantities of water sensitive chemicals stored in the laboratory.

Date all containers upon receipt. Potassium will form peroxides and super oxides when stored under oil at room temperature. Examine storage containers frequently. Dispose of any container that exhibits salt build up on its exterior. Dispose of all water-reactive chemicals whenever they are no longer required for current research.

Never return excess chemicals to the original container. Small amounts of impurities may be introduced into the container which may cause a fire or explosion.

**Special ventilation**

Special ventilation is required if these materials are used outside of a fume hood. If your research does not permit the handing of water-reactive chemicals in a fume hood you must contact the Office of Environmental Health and Safety to review the adequacy of all special ventilation.

**Spill response**

Anticipate spills by having the appropriate clean up equipment on hand. The appropriate clean up supplies can be determined by consulting the material safety data sheet. This should occur prior to the use of any water-reactive chemicals. Spill control materials for water-reactive chemicals are designed to be inert and will not react with the reagent. Do not put water on the spill.

In the event of a spill alert personnel in the area that a spill has occurred. Do not attempt to handle a large spill of water-reactive chemicals. Turn off all ignition sources and vacate the laboratory immediately. Call for assistance.

* University Police 856-256-4911. This is a 24 hour service.
* Office of Environmental Health & Safety 856-256-5105 or ehs@rowan.edu

Remain on the scene, but at a safe distance, to receive and direct safety personnel when they arrive.

**Vacuum protection**

Not applicable

**Waste disposal**

All materials contaminated with water-reactive chemicals should be disposed of as hazardous waste. Questions regarding waste pick up should be directed to the Office of Environmental Health and Safety at 856-256-5105 or [EHS@Rowan.edu](mailto:EHS@Rowan.edu). This office can also assist you in minimizing waste generation.