



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

The Disappearing Bottles

Author(s)

Anonymous

Year

2006

Description

A scenario that covers ethical issues that arise when doing research with hazardous chemicals.

Body

As a new graduate student you have just joined Professor Halle's research group. Colby is a senior grad student in Halle's group. The group has just moved into a new lab, which unfortunately contains leftover chemicals from a previous lab occupant. You overhear Halle tell Colby in a very loud voice to "Get that hood cleaned out, and do it NOW." Over the next few days, you notice progress in the lab cleanup, but are curious that you never see the actual waste--just a net decrease in the number of bottles in the hood. One evening, you return late to the lab and encounter Colby leaving the lab with a cardboard box containing some bottles. You greet each other in passing, but there is no mention of the box or its contents. You recall hearing that there are some strict rules on chemical disposal, but as a new student you have not yet had any formal orientation. You wonder if Colby is sneaking the chemicals out of the lab and disposing of them improperly. You would have asked Colby if you were friends, but you don't know how to raise the question without seeming to make an accusation.

- What can/should you do next?
- Do you know what the penalties are for improper disposal of chemicals? If not, how would you find out?
- Is there a safety office for your laboratory? For your department? What about a safety office or industrial hygiene office at your university?

Notes

Caroline Whitbeck introduced methods and modules for discussing numerous issues in responsible conduct of research at a Sigma Xi Forum in 2000. Partial funding for the development of this material came from an NIH grant.

You can find the entire sequence on the OEC at [Scenarios for Ethics Modules in the Responsible Conduct of Research](#). Some information in these historical modules may be out-of-date; for instance, there may be a new edition of the professional society's code that is referred to in an item. If you have suggestions for updates, please contact the OEC.

Contributor(s)

Caroline Whitbeck
Stephen Senturia

Rights

Use of Materials on the OEC

Resource Type

Case Study / Scenario

Parent Collection

Scenarios for Ethics Modules in the Responsible Conduct of Research

Topics

Lab and Workplace Safety
Safety

Discipline(s)

Chemistry
Computer, Math, and Physical Sciences

Research Ethics

Publisher

National Academy of Engineering