

NIH Radiation Safety Committee

Policy on Security of Radioactive Materials Source Vials

Background

In 2001 the NIH Radiation Safety Committee approved an enhancement to the existing policy regarding the security of radioactive material source vials.* The Committee regards the performance of the scientific community in maintaining the security of radioactive materials as exemplary. However, in order to place more emphasis on those radioactive materials which could present an exposure risk to an individual, the Committee believes that source vials of radioactive materials, when not in use, should be maintained in locked storage.

Advantages

As long as the source vials are locked within research laboratory refrigerators, freezers or storage cabinets, the laboratories may be left unattended and unlocked. Please note that this provision is only allowed when (1) no other radioactive materials are present, or (2) when other radioactive materials, such as radioactive waste containers, are simultaneously locked within the laboratory. The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, during their recent inspections, has not cited violations of the security regulations at NIH if radioactive materials are secured within the lab; violations are cited when radioactive materials are NOT secured within an unoccupied and accessible lab.

Implementation

A refrigerator or freezer is deemed locked if it is equipped with either a (1) keyed lock, (2) hasp and keyed padlock, or (3) combination padlock. Alternatively, a lockbox with restraining cable, which is available from commercial vendors, such as Research Products International, may be used to secure the source vials.

Timetable

This revised policy is effective immediately.

* A source vial is the original manufacturer's container of unsealed (liquid or frozen form) radioactive chemicals used in biomedical research.