

Safe Use of Personal Communication and Entertainment Devices in Laboratories

These guidelines apply to mobile phones, personal stereos, mp3 players and i-pods etc and have been developed as a result of recommendations received from HSE following an inspection of research laboratories.

Personal mobile phones and music players **must not be brought into or used** in laboratory areas where one or more of the following criteria apply:

- There is a high risk of them becoming contaminated with any of the hazardous substances being handled in the laboratory. This may then result in exposure of the individual via ingestion or skin contact. Contamination can also be carried out of the laboratory thus putting others at risk.
- They are cause of distraction, which is a potential hazard when carrying out safety critical procedures
- Where it is important to be aware of what is going on in the work area. Wearing ear phones interferes with the ability to hear alarms and to conduct normal communication. This can produce a sense of isolation from the environment and could be considered a serious risk to safety.
- Mobile phone signals may interfere with sensitive scientific equipment
- There is a potential for creating an ignition source in areas where flammable vapours are present.

Where it is essential that you can be contacted, please refer potential callers to the laboratory phone. When answering the laboratory phone always remove your gloves.

The use of larger items with loudspeakers such as radios, CD players etc is subject to the same considerations as above. In particular:

- Where there is a risk of contamination with hazardous substances the device must be considered as dedicated laboratory equipment and must not be subsequently removed to offices or other 'clean' areas.
- It must also undergo portable appliance electrical safety testing in accordance with University policy.
- It must be used with due consideration given to the wishes of others and turned off when the room is unoccupied.

University supplied DECT phones

Internal DECT radio phones are safer than mobile phones in laboratories where good working practice is employed to maintain low levels of solvent vapours, but may pose a hazard where there are higher levels of solvent vapour. Where risk assessment has determined that solvent vapours are at a level that makes the use of a DECT phone safe, their use must still be subject to the other aforementioned constraints.

DECT phones may also be at risk from contamination and their use must be carefully restricted. They may only be taken into laboratory areas under the following circumstances:

DECT phones must not be taken into higher risk laboratories (e.g. radiation, biohazard level 2 or 3) where accidental contamination could occur. In certain circumstances a dedicated DECT phone may be provided within a facility, but its use must be prescribed within local rules for the area

Lone working

It is acknowledged that there may be situations, such as lone working, where it is important to ensure the availability of a mobile phone as a control measure. Where this is the case the individual should keep the phone on their person, under their lab coat and only make calls in an emergency or accept calls as part of the agreed contact arrangement.

The availability of a mobile phone does not however remove the need for a proper assessment of the risks associated with lone working or substitute for other more robust checks. For example the lone worker could be incapacitated and unable to use the device.