1. Purpose

This guideline provides safety requirements for working alone in the research laboratory, shop, studio or other work area where hazardous materials, equipment, or conditions are present. Working alone, especially after hours, can be unsafe and should be avoided whenever possible. When it cannot be avoided, use other available means to protect lab workers in the event of an emergency situation.

2. Scope:

This guideline applies to all work with hazardous materials (chemical, biological or radiological material), hazardous equipment, conditions in research laboratories, shops, studios or other work areas at Carnegie Mellon University.

3. Program:

Minors: Persons under the age of 18 are never permitted to work alone in a research lab, shop, studios and other work area, even with non-hazardous materials. They must always have a mentor/supervisor present. The mentor/supervisor must be an employee of Carnegie Mellon University. This person must have received all the safety training pertinent to the work that the supervised students will be performing. The faculty member/supervisor must understand the hazards and risks involved in the activity and have reviewed the written SOP/safety protocol. Review “Minors in Research Laboratory, Research, Teaching and Other Program – Guideline” for additional information, including the requirements for the Supervisor, available at CMU EH&S webpage.

Undergraduate Students: Never permitted to work alone with hazardous materials or equipment. The PI/supervisor, researcher, or graduate student with safety training must be in/adjacent to the work area, and be able to check on their safety.

Graduate Students, Postdoctoral Fellows, Research Scientists, Technicians and Principal Investigators: These are considered full time laboratory workers, and laboratory training is integral to their professional training. They have completed all the safety training related to their laboratory work. They are permitted to work alone in a research laboratory after approval by the PI and following the lab’s safety
4. Responsibilities:

**Principal Investigator (PI) or Supervisor:** approve laboratory staff or students to conduct work with hazardous materials alone in the research laboratory or work area. PI or Supervisor is responsible to determine what level of hazards are permissible for working alone in their group. PI also needs to ensure that proper engineering, administrative and PPE controls are in place to conduct that work.

**Students, Researchers, or Workers:** Obtain PI approval before working alone in the research laboratory or work area, complete proper safety trainings and follow the proper procedure outlined in this guideline.

5. Definitions:

**Buddy System:** A “buddy system” establishes regular, routine checks on personnel working alone, such as every 15 – 30 minutes, to ensure no accidents have occurred. This could be accomplished by physically walking to the room where the lab worker is located. A system of visual checks ensures there are no problems and/or determines if help is needed.

**Working Alone:** A worker is considered as "working alone" if the individual is working by his/herself such that assistance is not readily available should some injury, illness, or emergency arise. Alone is interpreted as being out of visual contact with another person for more than a few minutes. It includes working in physical isolation, e.g. as the sole occupant of a laboratory or during a site sampling activity, where no other person is in the vicinity, i.e. within a short direct range or earshot. It is possible for a worker to be on the same floor of a building or even in the same general area as others, yet be working alone. It can occur during normal working hours as well as in the evening, at night or during weekends.

**Hazardous Materials and Equipment:** Hazardous materials include, but are not limited to, chemicals that are pyrophoric, water reactive, potentially explosive, acutely toxic, peroxide forming, strong corrosives, strong oxidizing agents, strong reducing agents and regulated carcinogens; biological material that is listed as a “select agent”; and radiological material. Hazardous equipment includes, any electrically, pneumatically, or hydraulically powered pieces of machine equipment (i.e. drill press, lathe, grinder, band saw, etc.) and high pressure/vacuum equipment.

A material is considered “hazardous” if it is classified as one or more of the following:
6. Procedures:

**Working Alone:**

1) Working alone, especially after hours, should be avoided whenever possible.
2) Conduct a Hazard Assessment of the work being performed and the risks and emergency requirements for working alone or after hours.
3) Prepare a written standard operating procedure (SOP) and safety protocol identifying the hazards, risks and the methods for controlling the risks.
4) Working alone and working after normal building hours requires supervisor/PI approval.
5) PI approval for working alone or after normal building hours must consider:
   - Tasks and hazards involved in the work.
   - Consequences resulting from a worst-case scenario.
   - The possibility of an accident or incident that would prevent the laboratory personnel from calling for help.
   - The laboratory personnel’s training and experience.
   - Time the work is to be conducted (during normal business hours versus at night or on weekends/holidays). See Appendix for *Permission to Work Alone Form*.

6) Have a cell phone on person with University Police Department phone number programmed in (412-268-2323). If no cell phone is available or there is no cell service, know where the campus phone is located and have the emergency number posted within the lab.

7) Each lab must develop a safety protocol for working alone (or use the recommended form in this policy). This protocol must clearly state what hazardous materials (chemical, biological and/or radiological), equipment, and/or procedures must not be performed when working alone. Example requirements are:

**The policy in this laboratory is:**

The following chemicals should not be used while working alone:

- Pyrophoric Chemicals
- Water Reactive Chemicals
- Potentially Explosive Chemicals or Compounds
- Explosive Salts
- Acutely Toxic Chemicals or Gases
- Particularly Hazardous Substances
- Regulated Carcinogens
• Other chemicals or substances deemed highly hazardous by PI, Lab Manager or EH&S

The following biological material will not be used while working alone:
• Select Agents (ex. Botulinum neurotoxins, Tetrodotoxin, Yersinia pestis)

The following procedures will not be conducted while working alone:
• Use of machine shop equipment or lathes.
• Procedures involving high-pressure equipment.
• Transferring large quantities [>10 liters] of hazardous materials
• Handling animals that could cause serious injury

Situations where working alone may occur include:
• Periodic attendance to check laboratory equipment/experiments
• Cleaning and maintenance activities in laboratories
• Working with analytical equipment
• Working in storage areas and temperature-controlled rooms
• Working in offices, libraries and at computer workstations

8) A copy of Emergency Response Guide for Laboratories, must be posted near the phone. The names and phone numbers for the lab and building contacts must be up to date.

7. Related attachments, forms or documents:
Instructions on Completing the Permission to Work Alone Form

Section I:
SHORT DESCRIPTION OF WORK TO BE DONE:
Please describe the specific type of work to be done (such as synthesis of X compounds, preparation of X samples, running of X equipment, conducting X type of experiment).

HAZARDS ASSOCIATED WITH THE WORK:
Please indicate the hazards associated with your materials, procedures or equipment. If “other” is checked, please indicate the specific hazard(s).

Section II:
DURATION OF PERMISSION:
Please indicate the duration of the permission. This can be for a specified duration (such as a semester or a year if a known endpoint has been established), or indefinitely (such as the duration of studies, duration of employment or duration of the project, etc.).
PROCEDURES IMPLEMENTED TO MITIGATE THE RISKS FROM THE HAZARDS ABOVE:
Please specify the measures in place that will protect the person working alone. These can be engineering controls (such as fume hoods), personal protective equipment (gloves, lab coat, safety glasses, goggles, etc.) or administrative controls (such as PHS protocols, procedures). The safeguards should match the level of risk associated with the hazard of working alone, and cover possible scenarios. Please specify what measures will be taken beyond what would normally be done if someone else was in the room. If necessary, additional sheets can be attached.

PLAN IF WORKER CANNOT SUMMON HELP:
Please indicate the strategies you will use to address how an outside person will know that the worker needs help should they become incapacitated and cannot call for help themselves. It may mean letting someone else know when they will be working alone (day and duration) and having a check in within that period, whether an in-person physical check, a remote mobile check, or using an app that requires the worker to respond periodically. If a check in is missed, the outside person knows to call for help. Physical checks are preferred, but the other means are acceptable.

The PI must sign the Section II of this approval form.

For additional questions or concerns please contact EH&S: safety@andrew.cmu.edu
PERMISSION TO WORK ALONE FORM

SECTION I: Applicant

POSITION:        ___ GRAD. STUDENT       ___ POST DOC       ___ STAFF        ___ OTHER_________________

NAME: ____________________________________ ANDREW ID: ____________________ PHONE: ________________

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: __________________________________________________________________________

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF WORK TO BE DONE:

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________

CHEMICAL HAZARDS:

___ Flammable Liquids  ___ Peroxide Forming Chemicals  ___ Strong Corrosives
___ Strong Oxidizing Agents  ___ Strong Reducing Agents  ___ Other _____________________

BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS:

___ Select Agents  ___ Other  ____________________

PROCESS HAZARDS:

___ Machine shop equipment  ___ High-pressure Equipment  ___ Large quantity of material
___ Handling animals  ___ High voltage  ___ Other  ____________________

I have completed all applicable Environmental Health & Safety training at Carnegie Mellon University. In addition, I have received training in the proper experimental and emergency procedures from my principal investigator and understand those procedures for the work I am authorized to do.

APPLICANT SIGNATURE: ________________________________________________ DATE: ____________________

SECTION II: PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR APPROVAL

The applicant has been trained in the proper experimental, training & emergency procedures for the work to be performed, and understands those procedures. This lab worker has permission to work alone on this procedure.

BUILDING AND LAB NUMBER(S): ____________________________________________________________________

HOURS ALLOWED ACCESS TO LAB: ___________ DURATION OF PERMISSION: ___________________

PROCEDURES IMPLEMENTED TO MITIGATE THE RISKS FROM THE HAZARDS ABOVE:

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________

PLAN IF WORKER CANNOT SUMMON HELP:

Can the person rescue themselves in an emergency(Y/N)?

___ Physical check by _____________________               ___ Remote check by _____________________
___ N/A – Work not likely to incapacitate Identify the “Buddy”, if needed: ______________________

PI's SIGNATURE: ________________________________ DATE: _________________ PHONE: ____________________