Storage and consumption of food and drink in laboratories

Following recommendations from the Occupational Health and Safety Council and the Biosafety Committee, Senate resolved (31.10.1988) that the policy be formally adopted prohibiting the storage and consumption of food and drink in University chemical and biological laboratories.

The Biosafety Committee had agreed that the consumption of food and drink in laboratories was a highly dangerous practice and that a policy of no smoking, eating or drinking in biological sciences laboratories should be enforced. The Biosafety Committee also required that cosmetics should not be applied in laboratories where pathogens or carcinogens were handled or where recombinant DNA work was carried out.

It is the responsibility of University Schools/Centres and Institutes to ensure that the prohibition is enforced.

The Associate Director of Occupational Health and Safety has supplied the following information in clarification of Senate’s decision:

- Areas should be considered laboratories where chemicals or biological materials are handled for teaching and/or research purposes. Rooms which have been previously used as laboratories but which have had all laboratory materials removed from them and converted to offices may be considered as offices rather than laboratories.

- Eating and drinking may take place in offices attached to laboratories, but the occupiers of offices should be sensitive to the suitability of the practice should there be virtually no separation between the office and laboratory.

- Food and drink should not be consumed at desks in laboratories. However this would not prohibit the holding of lunches in sealed containers within a desk, if there are no other alternatives.

- If an area adjacent to a laboratory is to be used as a tearoom it should be clearly separated from the laboratory, i.e. partitions should extend from floor to ceiling.