

# HOW TO WRITE A JHU SAFETY NOTE ABOUT AN INCIDENT OR CLOSE CALL

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If you have experienced or witnessed an incident or close call, you can help the wider JHU research community to avoid similar future problems if you draft a JHU Safety Note. Don't worry if you're not a good writer: the Laboratory Safety Advocate will edit your Note for style and certain technical guidelines before it is published.

A Safety Note has three parts:

1. A description of the incident, usually in fewer than 3 paragraphs;
2. Several lessons to be learned or facts useful to know about the hazards involved in the incident. (Usually 3-5 bullet points);
3. A few open-ended questions that a presenter might use to start a discussion.

## WRITING INCIDENT DESCRIPTIONS

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Include the following in your incident description

- Date of incident;
- Campus and building (leave out the room unless it is essential to the explanation);
- Type of incident (fire, hazardous materials exposure, potential injury, etc.);
- All details necessary for a reader to understand the lessons to be learned from the incident and their importance.

Keep your description short. The incident report should not exceed 2-3 paragraphs.

DO NOT include PI, witness, or victim names or other personally-identifiable information. These are generally not relevant to the discussion and may be illegal to disclose (e.g. health-related information protected by privacy regulations).

## WRITING LESSONS LEARNED

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A "lesson learned" is a piece of advice to be followed or a fact to be aware of that would help the reader avoid the incident in his or her own work. Unless absolutely necessary, limit the number of "lessons learned" to five or fewer. End each "lesson learned" with a call to action: exhort the reader to do something positive to ensure his or her safety.

# Not Rocket Science: A JHU Safety Note

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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One use for JHU Safety Notes is as “canned” presentations for research group meetings, seminars, and the like. The audience will retain your lessons learned much better if there is a short discussion relating the lessons to their own work. You can help the presenter engage the audience by providing a few short questions that might begin a discussion. Make your questions open-ended: there should not be a simple yes-or-no answer, nor a short list of alternatives.

End the report with the contact information for the Homewood Laboratory Safety Advocate.

See the next page for a sample JHU Safety Note.

# INCIDENT — FIRE, REMSEN HALL (JUNE 2013)

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A researcher was flame-sealing a glass tube using an oxy-gas torch. The tube had been dipped in liquid nitrogen to condense its contents before the sealing operation, so the researcher was using a lab wipe to handle the cold glass. The wipe ignited and fell into the laboratory waste box, which also ignited. The researcher extinguished the resulting fire using a dry-chemical extinguisher mounted in the hallway outside the lab. Neither the fire department nor Security was called, nor was the building fire alarm sounded.

## LESSONS LEARNED

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- The work should not have been done near the lab waste box (or using a lab wipe to hold the tube). Flame-sealing or any other “hot work” involving open flames, sparks, or hot surfaces should never be performed near combustible materials. **The National Fire Protection Association has specific good practice recommendations for hot work—contact Health, Safety & Environment for assistance with making your hot work area fire-safe.**
- The researcher was not trained to extinguish fires, and he should not have used the hallway fire extinguisher. **JHU requires that untrained personnel never attempt to extinguish fires.** Amateur firefighters endanger themselves and others, and while a building can be replaced, your life or that of your colleagues cannot. **Evacuate, sound the fire alarm, and call Security at x6-7777 instead.**
- The torch used was lacking many important required safety features, such as pressure-rated hoses to prevent leaks, non-return valves to prevent backflow of oxygen into the building gas system, and flame arrestors to prevent flashback into the hoses. **If you do not know if your torch has these items, contact Health, Safety & Environment to have it inspected.**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. How do we use open flames in our lab?
2. What fire risks are there from our lab procedures?
3. Where are the fire loads—large combustible objects or conglomerations—in our lab?