

Children and babies at work

With a trend for many of the staff to bring young children and babies into the building I wanted alert you to the ANU's policy on children in the workplace http://info.anu.edu.au/policies/Procedures/Human_Resources/Children_Within_the_Workplace.asp and cover some additional issues that you might want to consider that are relevant to the safety of your child.

The ANU's policy excludes children from potentially hazardous areas, which include laboratories, workshops and the like. There is a general assumption that offices, corridors, meeting and tearooms are safe places. They should be, but we rely on every one doing the right thing for this assumption to be valid.

There are specific dangers in

- The building design
- Electrical hazards
- Chemical hazards
- Biological hazards.

Building design

The buildings and fit out are designed for adults. You will be aware that we have gone to some considerable efforts to improve the safety, particularly in the Banks building. Such things as glazing-in the balcony and stairs are good examples. However there remains other hazards such as the pond, open doors into labs and general service areas, doors with closures, lifts etc. Your vigilance is essential where children are concerned.

There are nearly always maintenance staff working in the building and we rely on them to, not only carry out the work in a safe manor, but also leave an area in safe condition. Unfortunately this has not always been the case. An extreme case was live electrical wires hanging in the corridor.

Electrical hazards

Very few areas in the building are protected with residual current devices. These are devices are compulsory in new homes and will trip the circuit breaker if there is any current leakage to prevent electrocution.

The recent electrical testing also turned up many appliances (including personal heaters) that failed. Having one of these in your office is a real hazard to any child.

Chemical Hazards

Be aware that the tearoom contains detergents and other cleaning chemicals.

We also rely on everyone in the building doing the correct thing in relation to chemical handling. Remember it takes only one person to walk out of the lab with contaminated gloves (or hands or clothing) and there is a route for something like phenol or ethidium bromide to be spread through out the building. It is entirely possible that the student that

just visited you in your office may have put a chemical contaminate on door handles, desk or other. Small amounts of these chemicals can cause severe eye damage and poisoning.

Biological Hazards.

Here there are at least two areas of concern. These are the organisms that get brought into the building routinely with samples of soils, animals and their blood to name a few. There can be any number of infectious agents and it is possible that a child habits will bring them into contact with such samples if rigorous hygiene is not practiced.

The other is a long-standing issue of people bringing dogs into the building. Despite the explicit ban on dogs we do know that they are continuing to be brought into the building and even defecate inside. Here we have a real possibility of passing on hydatid and toxocariasis to name a few. These organisms can be easily transferred into common areas and your office.

There also remains an issue with the transfer of materials, both chemical and biological within the building. It is critically important that any passage of these materials through corridors and other common areas is done in a way that fully contains the material and does not lead to any contamination of door handles, trolleys etc. The removal of gloves before people leave the laboratory is vital.

Similar dangers to small children exist at PCF. This applies at weekends as well as workdays. In the outside areas it is unpredictable when the gardeners' vehicles are on the site, when the garbage will be emptied (BIG blue truck) and when our own tractor is in use. The site is quite large, and any roaming children can be exposed to many other dangers such as falling tree limbs etc.

It should be noted that children are not permitted in the glasshouses because of hazards which include floors that are sometimes wet and may be slippery. If you slip while carrying a child, you and the child could fall into the glass panels. In many of the areas pesticides are also in use. These are normally applied on Fridays, and as with-holding periods vary, it cannot be predicted when safe entry is assured. (usually OK by the Monday after).

We will attempt to remove any hazards that are drawn to our attention however I thought that you should be aware of some of the issues and our reliance on all staff and students to follow best practice. It would be naive to expect this outcome all the time so I urge you to consider carefully these and other unspecified hazards if you decide to bring your child/baby into the building.