

SSHE Newsletter 1/2016

May 2016

1) From the Uniformed Security Service

In the last newsletter ([3/2015](#) →), we reported on the daytime duties of the Uniformed Security Service (SiDi). In this issue, we highlight some examples of important SiDi activities from the recent past.

One incident took place on the ETH-Zentrum campus in mid-April: At three o'clock in the morning, the SiDi officer on duty spotted someone scrawling scribbles (known as "tags") on ETH-Zurich and road signs. The SiDi officer contacted the police and was able to lead the police officers to the perpetrator, who was subsequently arrested. Tags or graffiti cost ETH Zurich money and cause administrative expense. Thanks to the SiDi officer's help in convicting the tagger, however, ETH was able to transfer the cleaning costs to the culprit and ultimately saved the expense.

Another intervention by a SiDi officer at the end of March 2016 was also significant: Two people had gained unauthorised access to the HPH building and were in the civil protection shelter when a member of ETH Zurich informed the Emergency Desk. The latter notified the SiDi, which headed to the scene to clarify the situation. The intruders were a young man wanted by the police and a teenager who had run away from a home for children with behavioural problems. The SiDi officer approached the two individuals and was eventually able to hand them over to the police.

Besides these incidents, there are other examples where the SiDi intervened successfully: when a water pipe burst in the CLA, for instance, and a cleanroom was affected. Without the actions of the SiDi, the staff of the building area (Facility Management Department) and a user representative, the damage would have been far worse. There was also a case where a SiDi officer and a member of the building area rescued a student who had got stuck in a lift in the HG. With its ability to intervene, the SiDi thus makes a key contribution towards safety, security and the smooth operation of ETH Zurich.

2) Drill with the Chemical Incident Response



Decontamination point

Large-scale laboratory clean-up: A research group prepares chemicals and gas bottles that are no longer required in a fume hood for disposal. Suddenly, one of the small gas bottles starts hissing; the old valve has sprung a leak and corrosive gases are filling the fume hood. The staff immediately leaves the lab and calls the Emergency Desk (AZ) on phone number 888, which, in turn, calls out ETH Zurich's Chemistry Intervention Team (CIT) run by Ines Raabe (SSHE). Protected by chemical-proof suits and compressed air breathing apparatuses, the CIT takes immediate action at the scene and conducts measurements to assess the risk of the gas spreading to adjacent rooms. As special equipment was needed to recover the damaged gas bottle and ventilate the laboratory, the CIT officer in charge decided to call out the Chemical Incident Response of Schutz und Rettung Zurich.

Thankfully, this was merely a drill and a fog machine was used to simulate the corrosive gases. But it was a realistic choice of scenario: About once or twice a month, the CIT is called out for serious incidents, sometimes along with the Chemical Incident Response. In order to practise the interplay between the AZ, CIT and Chemical Incident Response, joint drills were held on the Höggerberg campus at the beginning of the year. The feedback on this series of drills from those involved, especially the Chemical Incident Response, was so positive that joint drills will also be conducted in the future.

Are the Alarm Bells Ringing?

Due to legal requirements, ETH Zurich now also has to inform users in buildings with fire-alarm systems about a fire alarm acoustically (formerly, only so-called “silent alarms” were required). Individual buildings have already been equipped accordingly. Each acoustic alarm is active from 5:30 p.m. to 7 a.m. In the event of an alarm, watch out for signs of fire or smoke. If you discover any, please alarm the Emergency Desk immediately. The alarm does *not* mean that the building needs to be evacuated. If an evacuation is necessary, you will receive clear instructions via a PA system, email, the landline or mobilised members of the Fire Alarm Team.

3) Laboratory Utensils in Wastewater



Pipette tips clog up the plughole

Chemical wastewater from the respective ETH-Zurich laboratory buildings is collected in various tanks before entering the sewage system via neutralisation units. Unfortunately, large quantities of items such as pipette tips keep finding their way into the wastewater system, where they can clog up filtration systems or inlets and painstakingly have to be removed by the Facility Management. In order to prevent small laboratory utensils from accidentally getting into the wastewater, we recommend using appropriate strainers in

the plugholes of your laboratory sinks. Laboratory utensils belong no more in wastewater than chemicals. Do your bit to dispose of them correctly.

4) Asbestos in Drying Cupboards



Asbestos rope seal

In the past, asbestos was also used in equipment and apparatus, particularly on account of its fireproof and heat-insulating properties (cf. [SSHE Newsletter 2/2014](#) →, [“life” March 2014](#) →). Although asbestos was banned in 1990, devices containing the hazardous substance, e.g. drying cupboards or high-temperature ovens, are still in use today – and ETH Zurich is no exception. Older devices therefore have to be tested for asbestos on-site and, if need be, disposed of or – if possible – fixed. SSHE will help you and cover the cost of these steps. New acquisitions are to be funded by the owners.

In older equipment, the following components might especially contain asbestos:

- Seals made of asbestos rope or cardboard-like plate
- Doors with a plate between fire-brick and metal casing (e.g. in high-temperature ovens)
- Cases made of fibre cement

Do you think you have equipment that contains asbestos in your lab? Then, please, contact sgu-gebaeudeschadstoffe@ethz.ch → stating the location and attaching a photograph. SSHE will take action, examine the apparatus if necessary and discuss how to proceed with you. If your suspicion is not confirmed, the equipment will be given an “asbestos free” sticker.

5) Lab Work and Music?

Thanks to smartphones or MP3 players, listening to music via headphones has become routine – even in the workplace. And why not? Music creates a pleasant atmosphere and has a positive influence on our frame of mind. But could it also be dangerous in the lab or workshop?

Needless to say, we usually like the music that comes out of our headphones; some people even sing or whistle along. In other words, we are distracted as a proportion of our attention is devoted to the music and we fail to give our work our full attention. Regardless of whether we listen to upbeat or calming music, our reactions to unexpected stimuli, e.g. dangerous situations, are slower than without music. When we listen to music through headphones, we perceive surrounding noises less effectively. The louder the music, the less we hear from our environment. Not only does the risk of failing to hear evacuation or gas alarms increase, for instance; we might also miss critical sounds, e.g. the whistling of a pressure relief valve, the hissing of an uncontrolled chemical reaction or the screeching of an overheated pump bearing.

By listening to music through headphones, we isolate ourselves from our surroundings and heighten the risk of an accident as we are distracted or oblivious to danger. Consequently, listening to music like this is not permitted while working in traffic, for instance, and should also be refrained from in the lab and workshop.

6) Newsflashes

- Do you frequently travel abroad for your work or degree at ETH Zurich, especially to tropical countries? The Financial Services Department's travel website provides a [leaflet](#) → on the Zika virus, where you can find out about the necessary precautions.
- Are you regularly in contact with research partners abroad but would like to limit your travel to at least avoid the associated stress and loss of time or reduce your CO2 footprint? The [Videoconferencing Service](#) → offered by the IT Services Department provides first-rate infrastructure for video conferences and consulting services on distance communication.

Published by

ETH Zurich, Safety, Security, Health and Environment (SSHE)

Tel.: +41 (0)44 632 30 30

[Katherine Timmel](#) →

[Reto Suter](#) →

www.sicherheit.ethz.ch →