Welcome Note  (By Farouk Merhebi – EHSRM Director)

Dear Readers,

Food safety was the talk of the town during the past two months. At AUB, EHSRM continued its regular safety inspection rounds at the cafeterias (Ada Dodge, OSB and Nestle Toll House) to make sure that the three operators are abiding by safety requirements and are implementing the necessary hygiene measures.

During the past months, EHSRM initiated several new activities to ensure the safety of AUB community and reduce injuries. EHSRM initiated the occupational risk assessment for different divisions of PEMC, based on which, a vocational training program will be developed for PEMC staff. EHSRM conducted air quality sampling in the Chemistry Department to test for asbestos fibers in the air; air samples were collected from several locations and sent to an accredited laboratory in the U.S. The results indicated the absence of asbestos fibers in the air. EHSRM reached an agreement with the Lebanese Atomic Energy Commission for the identification, conditioning, packaging, and proper storage of very old long-lived radioactive sources stored at DTS; this project is considered among the most important radiation safety projects ever carried out at AUB.

EHSRM conducted three successful workshops through the Campus Human Resources on Environmental Safety which covered chemical and radiationsafety, food hygiene and incident reporting; Occupational Hazards in the Workplace which covered noise, slips, trips and falls, electrical safety and the use of PPES; and Life and Fire Safety. All participants showed great interest in the usefulness of the material in their daily lives.

Article of the Month

Food Safety: Good Shopping Practices

Many concerns are currently raised regarding the safety of food we consume with a main focus on the food manufacturers and retail stores, and whether they are applying the basic safety and hygiene requirements. However, we shall not forget that we, as well, need to follow proper practices during shopping for food to ensure the safety of food we want to bring home. The following are some recommendations that you can apply to keep your food safe.

When you plan for shopping always start by the low-risk food items that do not require refrigeration such as cereals, dried pasta, biscuits, canned food and bread. As for the perishable food items, they should be picked up at the end before checkout. This is related to the fact that perishable items should not be kept at room temperature for more than two hours in order to prevent bacterial growth (one hour if the temperature is above 32 °C).

Perishable items include meat, poultry, dairy products, seafood, cooked rice, cooked vegetables, peeled/cut fruits, and ready to eat food such as sandwiches and pizzas. Such items should be kept, as much as possible, out of the temperature danger zone (5 °C to 60 °C) by packing them properly and refrigerating them as quick as possible.

When you select items check the expiry and use-by dates and always examine the packaging especially for frozen items. Do not buy products with damaged packaging or products that are soiled or have signs of thawing. Signs of frost or ice crystals could mean that the food in the package has either been stored for a long time or thawed and refrozen. Also do not buy bulged or dented cans or jars with cracked or loose bulging lids. A dent in a can, especially if affecting the seam might lead to contamination. This also applies for jars with loose lids which means that the vacuum has been lost and the product may be contaminated. As for eggs, you should not select cracked or dirty ones.

Separation of raw and ready-to-eat food is important. When you buy products such as raw meat, fish or chicken, ask for proper containment to prevent their juices from leaking to other food, and it is best to separate them from other items in the shopping cart or at the checkout in the grocery bags to prevent any potential contamination.

Finally, when you drive home, especially if the weather is warm and the air conditioner is on, place food in the passenger compartment and not the trunk. For long trips or hot days, you can place chilled or frozen food in a cooler or insulated bag to keep it cold.

Think Safe

1. The best way to thaw frozen food is on the counter at room temperature.
   a) True  b) False

2. Which of the below food items need to be cooked to the highest temperature?
   a) Beef steak  b) Chicken

3. How long would it take a 20 cm stock pot of steaming chicken soup to cool to a safe temperature in the refrigerator?
   a) 5 hrs  b) 12 hrs  c) 24 hrs

Check Answers on page 2

Safety Tips

- Bacteria are not able to multiply in food containing high concentrations of sugar, salt or vinegar. High protein food are preferred by bacteria especially raw or cooked meat, poultry and dairy products for being rich in nutrients and moisture required for bacterial growth.
- Avoid eating potato sprouts and remove any green or damaged parts before cooking. These parts are likely to contain unsafe high levels of naturally found toxins in potato: glycoalkaloids.
- Replace cutting boards if they develop hard to clean grooves as these can harbor bacteria.
In the Fridge
- Always separate raw and ready-to-eat food to prevent contamination. Place raw meat and poultry in the bottom shelf.
- Leave space between products to allow for air circulation and be careful not to block the cooling units.
- Refrigerate leftovers within two hours in order to prevent bacterial growth. Refrigerated leftovers may become unsafe within 3 to 4 days.

Answers to “Think Safe”
1. b. False. You should thaw food in the refrigerator because leaving frozen items at room temperature can allow for bacterial growth.
2. b. Chicken. Chicken requires the highest temperature. Check the above figure for the USDA recommended minimum temperatures noting that the color or texture of food does not accurately indicate that it reached temperature to kill bacteria.
3. c. 24 Hours. It can take 24 hours to cool to a safe temperature. Always divide large amounts of leftovers into small, shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator.

EHSRM in Action

The Environmental and Chemical Safety Unit conducted laboratory inspection in Biology, Chemistry & Agriculture; conducted training on PPEs and electrical safety for PLM and laundry staff, and on chemical handling for OR staff and nurses; conducted occupational risk assessment in 2 shops at PEMC; completed an air monitoring campaign on campus; carried on the baseline assessment on healthcare waste management at AUBMC; conducted air sampling and testing for asbestos in chemistry and biology; and conducted site safety inspections in DTS.

The Health Physics Services Unit planned and initiated work on the packaging of old long-lived radioactive waste to be performed by LAEC; completed the repatriation project of four old Iridium sources; made one consultancy visit to KMC; installed area monitors in the PET/CT facility; provided one training to Sawwaf Building residents; set requirements for the purchase of new lead goggles and lead aprons; coordinated with the chief of staff for the reappointment of the radiation safety committee and the laser safety committee; planned and executed the relocation of the liquid scintillation lab.

The Life and Fire Safety Unit witnessed the testing and commissioning of the FM-200 fire suppression system in the server room of the IFI project; started the testing and commissioning process of all safety related items and systems in MAB project; reviewed several materials submittals and conducted several site inspections in both the DTS renovation and the MAB projects; reviewed 5 in-house renovation projects at AUB and AUBMC; offered sessions and assistance in Life and Fire Safety to KMC staff; attended to gas leak in Ada Dodge cafeteria and a fire at AUBMC.

The Occupational Safety Unit conducted the Annual life and fire safety round across AUBMC; proposed an online incident reporting solution for occupational incidents that would improve reporting accuracy; carried out data base management and identification of trouble area; tested and certified the fume hoods at Pathology and Lab Medicine.

The Risk Management Unit followed up on many inquiries related to injuries and incidents; provided training regarding incident reporting during the AUBMC new employee orientation; and prepared the AUBMC annual incident report for the fiscal year 2013-2014.

The Sanitation and Biosafety Unit commissioned & recertified Biosafety Cabinets at Pharmacy, and PLM; provided commissioning & recertification services for Serum Products through REP office; conducted N95 fit testing for the nursing staff and ED physicians; provided training regarding HAZMAT during AUBMC new employee orientation; conducted inspection visits to AUB cafeterias; coordinated with the chief of staff for the reappointment of the radiation safety committee and the laser safety committee; planned and executed the relocation of the liquid scintillation lab.

Latest Activities

In the spotlight
Meet members of the Emergency Response Team (ERT)

Wissam Ahmad Merhi
Wissam joined AUB in 1990 as a staff at the Physical Plant Department and was among the first members of AUB’s ERT in 2000. Wissam responded to many emergencies at AUB, but he especially recalls the fridge’s explosion at AUBMC in 2006, the fire caused by burned oil in Kerr Hall, and the fire on the roof of the Nicely building in 2014. Wissam’s long experience in emergency response, being a previous member in the Red Cross’ Disaster Response Team, allowed him to take the proper action in each one of these cases. Wissam believes that among the most important qualities of an emergency responder is proper communication with affected persons.

Emile Najib Sabbagh
Emile joined AUB in 2005 as a receiving clerk at AUBMC receiving area. He joined the ERT in 2009. Emile remembers specifically his first response to a real fire at the Science Library; “Upon arriving, the smell was terrible and some of the books were on fire. It was hard to reach the location of the fire because of the smoke and the locked doors. We didn’t want to open the door to prevent the air from reacting with the fire thus making it more dangerous. It took a lot of effort and teamwork among ERT and the department’s staff to be able to extract the smoke using a big blower and start extinguishing the fire after extending a fire hose from the FAFS’ garden.”