

Helping Students Comply with Safety Rules

The student safety contract, which should be signed by both the student and a parent or guardian, is the foundation of the laboratory science safety program in the school. It is not enough, however, to set the rules and to “cover” them on the first or second day of class. Safety rules should be reviewed continuously throughout the school year, and they must be consistently enforced on a daily basis.

Did You Know?

The Flinn Scientific Student Safety Contract is available in both a middle school and a high school version, and also in Spanish! Visit the Flinn Scientific Web site at www.flinnsci.com to download copies of the safety contract.

Start with Safety!

Here are some ideas teachers have shared with us for reviewing the student safety contract and helping students remember the safety rules.

1. At the start of every class, read aloud one rule from the safety contract. By discussing safety every day, your students will quickly learn that safety is indeed your No. 1 priority! Reading one rule daily will allow you to review the entire safety contract three times over the course of the school year.
2. Incorporate safety into each laboratory exercise. Begin each lab period with a discussion of the chemicals, equipment, and procedures used in the experiment and the safety precautions that must be observed. Pay special attention to non-routine hazards, such as working with dissection equipment, that students may not encounter during every lab period. Pre-lab assignments are an ideal mechanism to ensure that students are prepared for lab and understand the safety precautions.
3. Have students make safety posters, and decorate the classroom or lab with the students’ artwork. Seeing their own bright, colorful safety posters throughout the lab will help remind students that safety is important to you and for themselves! Sure, you could buy posters, but how much better to engage the students and gain their perspectives. This is a great assignment for a “substitute-teacher day.” Provide paper, markers, and poster board and have students make safety posters to illustrate the rules in the student safety contract. You will be amazed at the students’ creativity, insight—and humor!
4. Record all safety instruction in your lesson plan. Every time you discuss safety in class, take a moment to write down in your lesson plan book what you talked about. Your lesson plan is a very valuable document should you ever have to prove that you are a responsible science teacher.

Regular and routine review of the safety rules will increase both student and teacher awareness of their safety in the lab and in the classroom. Make safety a habit!

Enforcing the Safety Rules

Make sure students know the rules and, more importantly, that there are consequences if they break the rules. All safety rules must be consistently enforced without discrimination.

Many teachers will issue a verbal warning or “safety ticket” for a first rule violation. If a second violation occurs during the same lab period, the student may be removed from the lab and given a zero for the day. If a student repeatedly disregards the safety rules, you must make the consequences more severe. The student may serve a detention or in-school suspension, and the student’s parents or guardian should be notified. Having the parents remind the students that they also signed the safety contract is often all it takes to correct the behavior. Repeated violations of the safety contract should be dealt with by the school administration.

Students who do not follow the safety rules endanger not only themselves, but all of their fellow students as well. Courts have ruled that the teacher and the school will be considered negligent if they do not enforce safety rules on a consistent basis.



Make Safety a Habit

We are grateful to teachers who have shared their time-tested ideas for ensuring student compliance with safety. You know these ideas will work!

- Make safety a team effort! Empower the lab team to be responsible for each member’s behavior. If a group member violates a safety rule, the entire group is warned and ultimately penalized. Peer pressure being what it is, you will find that the students themselves, rather than you, will begin to enforce the safety rules in the lab.
- Have students be in charge of presenting the safety lesson for a lab or classroom activity. Rotate this assignment among all the lab groups in the class, so that every group presents one safety lesson per quarter. Who knows better than teachers that the best way to learn something is to have to teach it!
- Students who wear their goggles around their necks or as “forehead protectors” should be assigned to wear their goggles during the next regular class period, whether it’s a test, a group activity, or a lecture.
- Anyone caught not wearing their goggles, they must sing the “Goggle Song” in front of the class. Alternatively, have the entire class sing the song.

The Goggle Song

The Goggle Song is sung to the tune of “I’m a Little Teapot.”
*I’m a little chemist,
Short and stout,
Here are my goggles,*

*And here are my eyes.
If I don’t wear my goggles, my teacher shouts:
Put them on or you get out!*