PROJECT SUMMARY

Texas A&M University’s controls over environmental health and safety operations provide reasonable assurance that a safe environment exists for students, faculty, and staff and that the University is in compliance with relevant laws, policies, regulations, and rules. Additionally, the University has implemented all of the recommendations from our previous audit of environmental health and safety which was completed in September 2007. Improvements are needed to ensure that all students enrolled in lab courses with physical and chemical hazards have received appropriate safety training before being permitted into the respective teaching laboratory.

The environmental health and safety program at Texas A&M University falls under the primary responsibility of the Environmental Health and Safety Department. The mission of the department is to provide services that promote a healthy and safe environment for the University community. The Environmental Health and Safety Department has 43.5 full-time employees and a fiscal year 2010 operating budget of approximately $2.94 million.

OBSERVATION, RECOMMENDATION, AND RESPONSE

Student Laboratory Safety Training Documentation

Observation

During the fall 2010 semester, 25,106 students were registered in lab courses which involved physical and chemical hazards. As of the fifth week of classes (September 29, 2010), approximately 10,906 (43%) students had not completed a signed student acknowledgment form to certify that they had received the appropriate safety information and instructions before being permitted into the teaching laboratory. Starting in the fall of 2010, the University transitioned from paper-based to electronic student laboratory training records using the Compass Student Information System. During the initial implementation of this new
According to Texas A&M’s Hazard Communication Program, students enrolled in lab courses will receive appropriate safety information and instruction. In addition, Texas A&M’s Laboratory Safety Manual states that students who have not signed the safety acknowledgement form shall not be permitted in the laboratory. Student laboratory safety training is important as it helps to ensure that students understand the physical and chemical hazards in the laboratory. Documenting that students have been trained helps demonstrate the University’s commitment to lab safety.

**Recommendation**

Develop a process that ensures that students have taken the required training before they are permitted in the teaching laboratories.

**Management’s Response**

_**Texas A&M University** acknowledges that the response rate for obtaining electronic lab safety acknowledgements from students enrolled in laboratory courses was inadequate for the fall 2010 semester. The conversion from a manual to electronic process did not allow sufficient time to inform faculty of changes prior to the beginning of the semester. The Executive Vice President and Provost will send a memorandum to the Deans explaining how the process has changed, the requirement for obtaining electronic signatures from students, and establishing a goal for compliance of 100%. At the beginning of each semester Environmental Health and Safety will coordinate the distribution of daily reports to the Deans which indicate the progress toward obtaining student signatures. Deans, through their department heads, will ensure that faculty members use the electronic system, monitor progress for obtaining student signatures, and take corrective actions as needed. These actions will be completed by November 2011._
BASIS OF REVIEW

Objective and Scope

The objective of the audit was to review and assess the University’s controls and processes over environmental health and safety operations to ensure that they provide reasonable assurance that a safe environment exists for students, faculty, and staff. Also, to determine that the University is in compliance with laws, policies, regulations, and rules relevant to environmental health and safety. The review of controls and processes over the University’s environmental health and safety operations focused on the areas of fire and life safety inspections, laboratory and shop inspections, inspection reporting, safety training, hazardous chemical administration, hazardous waste administration, and regulatory compliance. Transactions and activities related to these areas were reviewed for the period September 1, 2009 through September 30, 2010. Fieldwork was conducted primarily from September 2010 through October 2010.

Criteria

Our review was based upon standards as set forth in the System Policy and Regulation Manual of The Texas A&M University System; The Texas Administrative Code; Texas A&M University Rules and procedures; the Treadway Commission’s Committee of Sponsoring Organization’s Internal Control - Integrated Framework (COSO); and other sound administrative practices. This audit was performed in conformity with the Institute of Internal Auditors’ “International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.”

Additionally, we conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

The mission of the Environmental Health and Safety Department is to provide services that promote a healthy and safe environment for the University community. These services are designed to assist the University in achieving its teaching,
research, and service objectives with effective, efficient, and safe operations and compliance with applicable laws, regulations, policies, and standards. The department consists of the following six specialized safety areas each lead by a safety manager in that area: Hazardous Material Transportation and Agricultural Safety, Occupational Health & Industrial Hygiene, Occupational Safety, Environmental Management, Fire & Life Safety, and Radiological Safety.

The University classified 4,982 facility spaces as laboratories to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board as of fall 2010.
AUDIT TEAM INFORMATION

Charlie Hrncir, CPA, Director
Bill Williams, CPA, Audit Manager
Mark Heslip
Chris Powell
Darwin Rydl, CPA

DISTRIBUTION LIST

Dr. R. Bowen Loftin, President
Ms. Karan L. Watson, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs
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Mr. Chris Meyer, Assistant Vice President for Safety and Security
Mr. John Salsman, Director of Environmental Health and Safety