

University of Pittsburgh Safety Manual	EH&S Guideline Number: 03-010	
Subject: DRY SINK TRAPS	Effective Date: 03/01/2008 Review Date: 11/04/2020	Page 1 of 1

PREVENTING ODORS FROM DRY SINK TRAPS

Laboratory workers periodically report unusual odors in their work areas that smell nothing like any of the chemicals used in their labs. Typical odors are described as “sulfur-like” or sewer gas, mercaptan or hydrogen sulfide odors. If the smell is localized and appears to be unrelated to the ventilation system or neighboring labs, it frequently is traced to a dry sink trap, or unused floor drain.

Drain traps normally filled with water to create a seal between the building's sanitary sewer line and the system designed to ventilate the sewer gas. Without the water seal in a drain trap, sewer gas is drawn into the room, particularly when the lab has a fume hood or another type of specialized exhaust system.

1. Lab personnel can prevent sink traps and floor drains from drying out by running or pouring a quart of water into the drains once per week or month.
2. In labs where cup sinks or floor drains are no longer used, contact University plumbers to permanently or temporarily seal these drains.

The illegal practice of pouring hazardous chemicals into lab sinks can also contribute to problem odors in labs. Never dispose of lab chemicals down the drain.