Mercy College of Ohio

Laboratory Safety: CONTACT LENS WEAR

In the majority of cases, the correct emergency treatment for chemicals that enter the eye is to **wash the injured eye thoroughly with plain water for 15 minutes as soon as possible** (Ennis & Arons, 1979). However, this problem becomes more complicated when a person is wearing contact lenses for the following reasons.

1. Chemicals splashed into the eye or dissolved in tears from vapors will **creep under the contact lenses**. The contact lenses retain these chemicals against the eye so that they are **not rinsed away by normal tear action or by irrigation** until the contact lens is removed (Lowry, 1979).
2. Chemicals can diffuse into the interior of soft contact lenses, which **act as a reservoir** that creates additional exposure even if the lenses are removed and rinsed when the eyes are irrigated (Lowry, 1979).
3. Irritating substances in the eye may also cause a **reflex blepharospasm**. This clamping together of the eyelids makes removal of the contact lenses nearly impossible without general anesthesia (Rowe, 1979).

Since, with contact lenses, eye injuries can occur from exposure to chemical vapors (even without direct contact), the combination of contact lenses and safety goggles is not acceptable. Therefore, Mercy College of Ohio mandates that **STUDENTS MAY NOT WEAR EITHER HARD OR SOFT CONTACT LENSES DURING LAB CLASSES THAT INVOLVE CHEMICALS.** In those rare instances where contact lenses are required because of certain eye conditions, **we will accept a statement from a physician who understands the hazards involved.**

I have read the information in this handout and agree not to wear contact lenses in laboratory sessions. I understand that if I choose to wear contact lenses in these laboratories that I release the instructor and Mercy College of Ohio from any liability in the event of an eye injury.

Name _____
(Please Print)

Signature _____

Course _____

Instructor _____

Date _____

1. Ennis, J. and Arons, I. (1979). *Chem. Eng. News*: 57:84.
2. Lowry, G. G. (1979). *Chem. Eng. News*: 57:84.
3. Rowe, R. D. (1979). *Chem. Eng. News*: 57:84.