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The Right Plan for a Lab Move: How To Do It Safely, Do It Well

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If you've ever relocated – either your office or your home – you know how complicated a move can be. Now, in addition to computers and office furniture, you have to safely move extremely sensitive



lab equipment, chemicals and perhaps live cells or animals.

Another layer of complexity in a lab relocation is the dynamic nature of the schedule. You need to consider what long-term experiments might be affected or may not be arbitrarily interrupted without compromising the integrity of ongoing scientific research. Frequent communication with the scientists and operations staff relative to the construction and move schedule minimizes the anxiety surrounding a major relocation.

Finally, the permitting process for a new laboratory facility is much more extensive than for an office move. Depending on the type of research your firm conducts, permits may be required for an animal facility, chemical disposal, flammables storage, recombinant DNA, and use of radioactive isotopes, among others. The following highlights a number of the special planning considerations relevant to a lab relocation.

Lab Survey

As with any move, you will want an accurate

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inventory of what is moving. With a lab move, you need to pay particular attention to equipment utility requirements such as power, plumbing and ventilation, as well as unique dismantling, relocation or recalibration requirements. Your architect or lab planner, with input from your scientists and facilities staff, will create a detailed, dynamic

matrix specifying these requirements. They will list equipment dimensions, current location, and typically each piece of equipment is given a unique designation for efficient relocation. You will want to carefully verify the locations of all utilities before you move in, recognizing that once sited on the plans, you may not be able to change the locations of equipment with specialized needs.

Disposition

In a lab move, you need to be particularly careful to properly dispose of unwanted chemicals, supplies, and obsolete or broken equipment. A systematic approach to disposing of unwanted materials in advance of the move minimizes the cost and risk associated with the relocation. Cambridge Scientific is one good resource for buying and selling used equipment. The Massachusetts Biotechnology Council (www.massbio.org) also posts notices for used equipment.

Equipment

Prior to moving sensitive equipment, be sure to review existing warranties and maintenance plans. You may be required to involve the manufacturer or maintenance provider in the packing or reinstallation of equipment in order to maintain existing contractual agreements. HPLCs, mass spectrometers, and complex microscopes are good examples of equipment typically requiring

Lab Relocation Planning Checklist

- Status of experiments/research
- Identify equipment utility requirements
- Review warranties and UL rating
- Dispose of unwanted chemicals and equipment
- Select environmental firm and specialty movers
- Understand the permitting process and requirements
- Move chemicals and radioactive materials first
- Decommissioning equipment and facility
- Schedule vendor preparation of equipment
- Hire an experienced mover
- Set realistic milestones

vendor intervention. Fine balances and ultracentrifuges are examples of equipment that may not require vendor prep, but will most likely need recalibration after a move to ensure that the accuracy of measurements are still within specified parameters.

Now is also a good time to make sure that any piece of equipment that plugs into an electrical outlet will pass inspection. Most electrical conductors or equipment must be rated by an NRTL (Nationally Rated Testing Laboratory designated by OSHA). Underwriters Laboratory (UL) is the most commonly recognized NRTL. A majority of electrical equipment will already exhibit UL labels. Inspections are often triggered when a contractor obtains a permit to complete electrical work. Following a move, the facility may be inspected to confirm that the equipment is in compliance with occupational safety provisions of the National Electrical Code.

Animals

If you do not have the resources or equipment to move animals, there are specialty firms who are qualified to move them for you. These specialized movers will ensure that your animals are moved safely, in climate controlled vehicles, and will help to minimize the stress the animals experience

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when their environment and routines are disrupted.

Chemicals and Other Hazards

Diligent planning for the relocation of chemicals and other potential hazards is critical to the safety and success of the move. Qualified environmental firms have the necessary licenses, experience, documented contingency plans and adequate resources to support you in move planning and execution. Now is also the perfect opportunity to update chemical inventories and MSDS logs.

Typically, chemicals are moved and unpacked in their new locations in advance of the equipment relocation, thus reducing

the risk of spillage and accidents. Moving radioactive materials requires additional consideration. If your environmental firm of choice is not able to move radioactive materials for you, they should be able to refer you to a qualified firm.

When planning the amount of down time you can tolerate, be realistic. Include time to decontaminate equipment that may have come in contact with hazardous materials. In addition to being a safety concern, movers experienced in lab relocations will require evidence of proper decontamination before they will handle lab equipment. When pre-qualifying potential movers, request relevant project references.

In addition to decontamination for moving

purposes, you will need an exit strategy that satisfies the decommissioning requirements of your lease. Decommissioning is something you will need to address early in the relocation planning process, even though it is one of the last things you will do. Given that this effort may be extremely time consuming, many companies hire specialty firms to complete these tasks and provide the necessary certifications to your landlord.

Although all moves have common considerations, life science companies face unique challenges when it's time to relocate. A pragmatic approach to planning for and communicating a major lab relocation ultimately reduces the risk to ongoing research and minimizes the disruption to scientists. ■

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