



# SAFETY ALERT

## Lab Incident—Benchtop Fire

RISK MANAGEMENT & SAFETY

**Date:** October 2, 2020  
**Category:** Laboratory Safety  
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### Description

A small fire occurred in a laboratory when vapors from a spilled beaker containing ethanol ignited. The incident did not result in any injuries, only minor property damage. The incident occurred when a graduate student was sterilizing forceps by dipping them into a beaker containing ethanol and touching them to a Bunsen burner on a bench top. While removing the forceps from the beaker, the beaker was knocked over spilling the ethanol that ignited. The graduate student extinguished the fire with a fire extinguisher.

### Findings

- The graduate student was wearing a flame retardant lab coat, nitrile gloves and safety glasses.
- Fire extinguisher training had been completed by the graduate student.
- The benchtop was being used as a temporary workstation and there was limited space.
- The beaker of ethanol was made of plastic and a lid was not being used on it during the forcep sterilization process.
- The graduate student was rushing while performing the work.

### Causes

- Work station was cramped resulting in Bunsen burner being in close proximity to ethanol.
- Graduate student had performed this task several times in the past. It had become routine resulting in the task being rushed.

### Actions

- Develop a lab standard to store alcohol in a glass container with lid while using flame sterilization technique.
- Communicate incident and required actions for the task with all members of the lab.



All safety communications can be found at <https://riskmanagement.nd.edu/communication/safety-communication/>.

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