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OSIG NEWS

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For Immediate Release: March 26, 2020

OSIG RECOMMENDS HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS WORK MORE CLOSELY WITH LOCAL EMS ON CHEMICAL INVENTORIES MANAGEMENT

The Virginia Office of the State Inspector General (OSIG) conducted a performance audit on the management of chemical inventories at Virginia colleges and universities to determine if these institutions are effectively managing their chemical inventories to mitigate the risk of theft and misuse of chemicals, and to identify areas where safety and emergency preparedness might be improved. The Commonwealth of Virginia has 39 publically supported higher education institutions, including 15 that offer at least a four-year bachelor's degree, which presents the potential for a large chemical inventory for use in teaching and research.

“The audit focus was on the safe handling and accountability of chemicals used in research and instruction,” said State Inspector General Michael C. Westfall. “While OSIG’s audit scope only included Old Dominion University, James Madison University and Radford University, all higher education institutions should review the findings and recommendations for beneficial information that might assist efforts to manage chemicals used in teaching and research laboratories.”

In the report, [Higher Education Institutions: Chemical Inventory Management Performance Audit March 2020](#), OSIG recommended that higher education institutions regularly provide first responders with a complete and accurate chemical inventory, post chemical hazards and contact information on laboratory doors, conduct annual inventory counts of chemicals across all departments, and develop and enforce formal policies prohibiting donating chemicals and receiving donated chemicals.

The audit found that the schools’ principal investigators (PIs), i.e., those directly responsible for the chemicals, were using established state contracts to purchase chemicals from suppliers and vendors to help ensure that chemicals were purchased at the lowest cost while not sacrificing quality. It also found that satellite waste accumulation areas located in the labs were clearly labeled and the accumulated waste containers themselves were labeled. The audit also found that PIs were maintaining inspection logs in accumulation areas showing that inspections were occurring on a regular basis.

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Established in 2012, the Virginia Office of the State Inspector General manages the State Fraud, Waste and Abuse Hotline; conducts investigations and performance audits of state agencies; provides training and standards for the commonwealth’s internal audit programs; and conducts inspections and reviews of Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services-run facilities and programs.