Last week, staff in one of our buildings was cleaning up and was searching for cabinets to use to store items. A locked gray utility cabinet in a common hallway was opened during this cleaning effort. The locked cabinet hadn't been opened for a long time and held many old and some leaking chemicals containers (see attached pictures). One red safety can with residual liquid was labeled benzene. Benzene is a Class 1-B flammable liquid and a carcinogen. There was no clear ownership of the cabinet.

There are several lessons to be learned from this:

- Chemicals must be stored appropriately as per Chapter 40 of the ES&H Manual. These should not be in common areas and must be stored in appropriate storage assets (e.g., approved chemical storage cabinets). Chemical storage areas must be inspected monthly. The inspections should be performed by the owner of the storage asset.

- Any storage must have an identified owner. We recommend that the contact information be posted on the storage. This allows for better monitoring and control.

- Building Managers need to work with the various departments in their buildings to ensure that storage in common areas is appropriate. Common area storage areas should be inspected as part of the annual building manager’s inspection.

- As staffing changes, changes that affect chemical storage should be identified and dealt with appropriately. This includes re-evaluating work areas, storage cabinets, emergency supplies, etc. If an individual is leaving, chemicals that will no longer be used must be safely and appropriately dispositioned. This may include transferring or disposal of the chemicals. Please contact the Hazardous Materials Program Manager (x4538) for assistance.

- A hazardous material becomes a waste if it is not useful in its present form. In the event of a spill, leak or other imminent release from a hazardous material container, response actions deemed necessary must be taken to protect human health and/or the environment. The spill must be immediately contained, stopped, and cleaned-up. Please contact the Hazardous Waste Program Manager (x3586) or the Waste Management Group (x2399) for assistance.

In addition, there is merit on multiple levels to having annual, bi-annual, monthly, or weekly cleaning sessions. This may improve overall housekeeping, as well as allow for the on-going identification and mitigation of hazards.

If anyone has any questions please feel free to contact me.