



Security of chemicals

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From time to time we hear of incidents arising from the theft of, generally, chemicals from science departments. Although such incidents are quite rare they always cause concern and remind us of the need for continual vigilance. In a recent incident, a pupil stole some chemicals in order to make a pipe bomb, according to a recipe he obtained from a site on the Internet. Having constructed the bomb, the boy exploded it in a public place which led quickly, and unsurprisingly, to him receiving attention from the police. In this instance, the chemicals were stolen from an unlocked store room which led off the back of a lab and the theft took place when the teacher briefly left the laboratory. However, thefts of this sort have been known to occur from prep rooms, etc.

No science department likes to believe that the pupils it teaches really cannot be trusted, but evidently this is sometimes the case. The only safe course of action is to ensure that labs, prep rooms and chemical stores are securely locked when they are unattended. It is a sensible precaution to get into the habit of locking these rooms and stores, even if staff are away for only a short time. It does not take long to remove a few containers of chemicals and, even when a teacher or technician is present, vigilance is needed to ensure that a determined pupil does not sneak into a room or cupboard when the member of staff's back is turned. This has long been the advice from the Safeguards Committee and it is timely to remind teachers and technicians about this.

Thefts are usually much less dramatic than the above example. Pupils frequently take some or all of the stock of magnesium ribbon which has been left out during a practical session. It is a wise precaution, therefore, to make sure that only enough 'attractive' chemicals are put out for practical lessons and to ensure that the teacher keeps a close eye on them. Teachers and technicians will be well aware of other items that pupils find irresistible and the good 'housekeeping' of counting such items back before the end of a lesson should always be the routine.

For guidance from the Home Office on storing chemicals securely in schools please see:

<http://science.cleapss.org.uk/Resource-Info/SYC-Secure-your-Chemicals-Education.aspx>