



Incubators and Ovens

Schools often need to site their incubators and/or ovens in laboratories used by classes. Occasionally, we receive reports of incidents resulting from pupils tampering with the thermostat control. The most common problem appears to arise when the oven contains biological preparations in screw top containers: if the temperature is turned up, the containers explode as the water boils. Screw-top containers should never be tightly sealed in an oven or incubator (or indeed when sterilising in an autoclave or pressure cooker). Thermometers left in ovens have also been known to explode when the thermostat has been turned up beyond their range.¹

Teachers should maintain constant vigilance and, of course, place a total ban on interfering with equipment in any laboratory. This is easier said than done, however, and it is worth pointing out that the best incubators and ovens incorporate a locking device on the thermostat, usually operated by an Allen key or similar. Schools should ensure that any such lock, if fitted, is in fact used, and that it has not become so worn that it does not operate properly. Avoid mercury in glass thermometers.

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