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FAQs: Reporting of Spills and Accidents involving Human Cell Culture

Purpose: to provide examples which will clarify reporting requirements to the IBC of spills of human cell cultures outside of the biosafety cabinet. The purpose of reporting any incident is always to identify areas where additional training or modification of procedures could lower the risk of recurrence.

- 1. Q. Do I need to report a spill of HeLa cells on the floor of the tissue culture room?**
 - A. No. Although HeLa cells are classified as a BSL-2 agent, they are not recombinant, not classified as a Risk Group 2 agent, and are thus considered exempt from reporting requirements. Although HeLa cells are known to be HPV positive, HPV is very difficult to propagate in routine cell culture, and the HPV in HeLa cells is integrated into the genome; therefore, the risk of HPV infection from a HeLa spill is extremely low.

- 2. Q. Do I need to report a spill outside the BSC of HEK293T cells being used to package a Lentiviral construct?**
 - A. Yes, because the Lentiviral vector is a recombinant Risk Group 2 agent.

- 3. Q. Do I need to report a spill of a human cell culture on the floor if the cells were stably transduced with a GFP-fusion construct?**
 - A. It depends. The nature of the transgene is a factor. Basically, if the transgene renders the cells more hazardous than the cells alone, then the spill should be reported. An example would be a GFP-oncogene fusion. On the other hand, if the cells were transduced with a replication-defective, third generation viral construct, and have been passaged several times, so that the presence of residual viral particles is highly unlikely, reporting is not required. Likewise, spills of cells stably transfected with a plasmid construct do not need to be reported, unless the transgene renders the cells more dangerous than the non-transduced cells alone.

- 4. Q. Do I need to report a spill of non-recombinant Salmonella on the floor?**
 - A. Yes. While the NIH Guidelines pertain only to recombinant DNA or organisms, the OHSU IBC requires reporting of spills of all Risk Group 2 agents, for the simple reason that lab practices that lead to the spill of a non-recombinant culture could just as easily lead to the spill of a recombinant culture.