SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES
Sept. 20, 2013

Present: Rick DuVall, Mike Logan, Bob Lucht, Peter Meckl, Justin Seipel, Mike Sherwood, John Starkey, Nathan Toner, Justin Weibel

Absent: Becky Schumm

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Approve Minutes from April 16 Meeting

3. Grad Student Safety Orientation:
REM once again gave a 1-hour safety overview as part of orientation for all incoming ME graduate students. After I gave a brief overview of the importance of safety, Judah Young from REM talked about proper handling of gas cylinders, Mike Sherwood discussed machine shop safety, and Adam Krajicek (also from REM) talked about proper disposal of hazardous waste and appropriate use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

4. Safety Procedures for Faculty and Grad Students:
We had a lengthy discussion of how best to embed safe operating procedures into daily workflows. A number of examples from other Schools or organizations were cited. In particular, EPICS teams are required to sign a document that spells out the do’s and don’ts of lab safety. In BME, each lab has a safety team. In ChE, each lab has a grad student in charge of safety.

Justin Weibel recommended requiring each student to fill out a hazard assessment form prior to working with any equipment. In so doing, they would gain a deeper understanding of the equipment, as well as a fresh look at the potential hazards in running it.

It was agreed that the best way to achieve a “safety culture” was to have faculty buy-in as well as students emphasizing safety in a bottom-up fashion.

Justin Seipel also mentioned that Maker spaces – places where people can go to use shop equipment – tend to be very safe, partly because safety is “cool”, since their knowledge of proper equipment use is recognized, much like a black belt in judo, to demonstrate their mastery.

Besides this positive approach to safety, one could also use scare tactics to scare people into using safe procedures. If safety protocols are viewed as impediments to getting the job done, then perhaps this approach can help overcome resistance. However, as motivating as fear is, it can also cripple a student just when clear thinking is most needed.

Clearly, more specific expectations need to be articulated to all new graduate students to let them know that they must do a hazard assessment prior to running their equipment. Likewise faculty, both old and new, must be made aware of these expectations, and share them with their students. Perhaps a series of faculty luncheons could be used to disseminate some of this information.

5. ME Safety Web Presence:
It was agreed that information on hazard assessments, safety procedures, etc. needs to be more readily available, ideally on a central webpage for ME. Nathan Toner has agreed to help with this. It will likely also need help from Mike Black and Heather Coar.

6. Schedule Next Meeting:
Next meeting will be in the morning of Oct. 18, 2013.