Research and teaching activities often require personal protective equipment (PPE) to ensure maximum safety of personnel. A lab coat is an essential component of PPE for many types of laboratory work. This fact sheet will assist the researcher in selecting the appropriate lab coat type for the hazard encountered.

Tips on Wearing Lab Coats

- Always ensure lab coat fits properly; tailor as necessary.
- Wear appropriate clothing under lab coat including long pants and closed-toe/heel shoes. Wear personal clothing that is natural rather than synthetic fibers (cotton jeans vs. Lycra leggings) if working with flammable liquids or open flames.
- Fully button/snap the lab coat and wear in conjunction with other PPE such as eye protection and gloves.
- Lab coats provide moderate protection against chemical exposure, but may degrade over time. Replace if heavily soiled or visibly degraded.
- Immediately remove and dispose as hazardous waste if grossly contaminated.

Lab Coat Selection Guide

Flame Resistant, Nomex®
Nomex® is a meta-aramid synthetic fiber that provides the highest level fire protection for a lab coat. The material is intrinsically flame resistant. Its protection will not diminish over repeated washes. Appropriate for protecting against the following:

- Open flames
- Electrical arc flash hazard
- Extreme fire hazard (e.g., large volumes of flammable materials)
- Organometallic compounds, metal hydrides, alkali metals, or other materials that ignite on contact with air (pyrophoric) or moisture

Flame Resistant, Treated Cotton
Cotton lab coats that are treated with flame resistant material provide a good balance of protection from chemicals, and low-to-medium fire risk procedures.

- Not appropriate for use with pyrophoric materials. Must use Nomex® (see above)
- Appropriate for limited work with well-controlled open flames (e.g., bunsen burner)
- Appropriate for work with solvents and other flammable liquids
- The flame retardant properties of the coat may decrease after frequent laundering; replace according to manufacturer recommendations

Standard Cotton
Coats made from 100% cotton are not as fire resistant as Nomex® or treated cotton, however, unlike synthetic blend coats, the cotton coat will not melt and adhere to the wearer.

- Appropriate for use when working with chemicals, radioactive materials, or physical hazards, but only where risk of fire is low
- Flammable liquids - only appropriate for use with minor volumes of flammable materials under low risk conditions (e.g., undergraduate teaching labs)

Fluid Resistant
Barrier coats are made from 100% polyester and prevent fluid penetration.

- Appropriate for use when working with biological materials, bodily fluids, blood, blood-borne pathogens, tissue, cell lines, microbial cultures, and other potentially infectious materials.
- Polyester coats will readily burn and melt, and should never be used with pyrophoric substances, flammable liquids, or around open flames (e.g., bunsen burner)
Laundering Service for Lab Coats

Visit the Lab Coat Laundering web page (http://bit.do/usc_labcoatlaundering) to learn about the laundering service. To launder lab coats by Angelica, the lab coats must have Angelica barcodes (see example at right). The barcodes have the following information encoded: Principal Investigator; Department; School; Building Code; Lab Room; PU/DO location (UPC or HSC); and Angelica account number.

*Without a barcode to identify the owner, soiled lab coats may not return from the laundering facility.

Each lab coat will need a completed Angelica Repair Tag (http://tiny.cc/usc-ehs_AngelicaRepairTag; see illustration at the right).

Page 2 of the New Lab Coat Purchase Fact Sheet details steps to have lab coats barcoded (http://tiny.cc/usc-ehs-labcoatPurchase).

Additionally, research groups relocating to another building will need to have their lab coats re-barcoded to ensure that the lab coats return to that building or a convenient PU/DO location (UPC or HSC) nearby.

Questions? Contact EH&S at 323.442.2200 or EHS@usc.edu