KAUST Shelter-in-Place Guidance: Offices and Laboratories

Common workplace actions

When a KAUST shelter-in-place alert is issued, faculty, staff, students, contractors, and visitors should:

1. **Go indoors or remain inside.** If outdoors, enter the nearest safe building; do not cross campus to reach a usual office, laboratory, vehicle, or residence.
2. **Move to the best available protected location.** Use an interior office, meeting room, corridor, or other suitable area away from exterior windows, glass doors, skylights, exterior walls, and outside-air intakes. Avoid overcrowding and use more than one interior room if necessary.
3. **Close exterior openings.** Close windows and exterior doors. Close blinds or shades where available, particularly when broken glass or an external blast is a concern.
4. **Do not independently operate central HVAC systems.** Facilities personnel should implement any building ventilation shutdown, isolation, or recirculation action directed by incident leadership. Occupants should only close local vents or operate local controls if the alert or an authorized person instructs them to do so.
5. **Account for people.** Supervisors, hosts, principal investigators, and laboratory managers should make a reasonable check of staff, students, contractors, and visitors in their immediate area and report anyone missing, injured, or needing assistance through the designated building or emergency channel.
6. **Monitor official KAUST communications.** Keep phones available, minimize nonessential calls, and follow subsequent instructions. Do not leave because the normal workday, class, meeting, or experiment has ended.
7. **Remain sheltered until the official all-clear or a new protective instruction is issued.** Shelter-in-place may later change to evacuation if conditions change.

Classification: Internal

Office-space guidance

Individual and shared offices

Occupants do not automatically need to leave an office merely because it has windows. If the room remains safe, close the window coverings and move to the part of the room farthest from exterior glass. If the office is highly exposed or does not provide reasonable separation from exterior glazing, move by the shortest safe indoor route to a nearby interior office, meeting room, corridor, service core, or other designated shelter area.

Open-plan areas

People working in open-plan offices should move away from glazed perimeter areas and gather in suitable interior rooms or protected core areas without blocking exits, fire doors, stairs, or emergency equipment. Building or departmental plans should identify primary and alternate interior locations in advance so staff do not improvise during an alert.

Meetings and visitors

Meeting organizers and KAUST hosts should keep visitors with the group, explain the instruction briefly, and include them in accountability checks. No one should go outside to retrieve a vehicle, belongings, or another person unless directed by emergency responders.

Office equipment

For a routine shelter-in-place response, staff should prioritize personal safety rather than spend time shutting down computers, printers, or securing records. Equipment may be placed into a normal safe state only when this can be done immediately and without delaying movement to the protected area. KAUST emergency plans already contemplate a soft shutdown of office equipment when circumstances and time permit.

Classification: Internal

Laboratory guidance

Immediate response

Laboratory personnel should stop active work and place experiments and equipment into the safest readily achievable condition **only if this can be done without delaying protective action or increasing exposure**. Life safety takes precedence over research, samples, data, and equipment.

Where safe and immediately practicable, the response may include:

- Extinguishing open flames and switching off hot plates or other heat-producing devices.
- Closing chemical fume hood sashes.
- Biological safety cabinets (BSCs): Stop active biological work, secure biological materials, and leave the BSC blower operating unless an approved procedure or authorized emergency instruction requires otherwise. Maintain the sash in the position specified by the cabinet manufacturer or laboratory procedure. Do not switch off the cabinet solely because a shelter-in-place alert has been issued.
- Capping open chemical, biological, or radiological material containers.
- Closing gas cylinder valves or process gas valves in accordance with the laboratory shutdown procedure.
- Securing hazardous materials and waste in their designated containment or storage.
- Stabilizing or terminating reactions that could become hazardous if unattended.
- Checking pressure-, temperature-, air-, moisture-, and vacuum-sensitive operations.
- Ensuring cryogenic systems remain safely vented.
- Leaving essential refrigerators and freezers operating and keeping their doors closed unless a specific shutdown procedure requires otherwise.

Laboratory personnel should not attempt an unfamiliar shutdown, handle a developing spill, enter a hazardous area, or remain behind to protect research. Each laboratory should have a written, posted emergency shutdown checklist tailored to its hazards, equipment, research animals, and essential utilities.

Classification: Internal

Selecting a laboratory shelter location

A laboratory should not automatically be treated as the preferred shelter. Principal investigators and laboratory managers should determine in advance whether each laboratory is suitable for temporary shelter or whether personnel should move by a safe indoor route to a nearby interior office, seminar room, corridor, or other designated protected space.

Factors that may make a laboratory less suitable include substantial exterior glazing, high-hazard operations, compressed gases, reactive materials, processes that cannot be safely unattended, or dependence on ventilation that may change during an external airborne emergency. Shelter areas must not obstruct emergency egress or place occupants beside hazardous storage or active equipment.

Ventilation and fume hoods

The laboratory section requires more careful wording than general office guidance. If building ventilation is shut down or a hood or cabinet alarms or loses airflow, no work should continue in that device. Close the sash where appropriate, stop or stabilize work if safe, secure the area, move to the designated shelter location, and report the condition.

Internal laboratory emergencies

A campus shelter-in-place alert does not require someone to remain in a laboratory that is immediately unsafe. If there is fire, smoke, a significant spill or release inside the room, structural damage, a ventilation failure creating a hazardous atmosphere, or another imminent local danger, isolate the area if possible, warn others, activate the relevant emergency procedure, call KAUST 911, and move by the safest route as directed. A building fire alarm or responder instruction to evacuate takes precedence over general shelter-in-place messaging unless an authorized emergency instruction explicitly directs otherwise.

Classification: Internal

Shelter, evacuation, and lockdown

Instruction	Use	Workplace response
Shelter-in-place	Conditions outside or movement through the affected area are more dangerous than remaining indoors	Stay or go inside; move to a protected interior area; close external openings; take hazard-specific ventilation actions only as directed; monitor official communications.
Evacuation	Remaining in the room or building is unsafe	Stop work; perform only an immediate safe shutdown if time permits; leave by the safest designated route; do not re-enter until authorized.
Lockdown	A hostile or intrusive security threat is inside or immediately near the building	Secure the room, reduce visibility and noise, move out of sight lines, stop movement, silence devices, and follow Security or law enforcement instructions.

Shelter-in-place should not be communicated as synonymous with lockdown. The two actions may share elements: remaining indoors and staying away from window, but their purposes and room postures differ. A general shelter-in-place alert should not automatically direct people to turn off lights, hide, barricade doors, or remain silent unless a lockdown or external security-threat instruction is also issued.

Recommended messaging for laboratory leads

What should I do in an office?

Remain inside your building and follow the alert. Close exterior windows and doors, then move away from exterior glass and outside-facing entrances. If your office is highly exposed, move by the shortest safe indoor route to a nearby interior office, meeting room, corridor, or designated shelter area. Keep visitors with you, check on colleagues who may need assistance, monitor official KAUST communications, and remain sheltered until the official all-clear or another instruction is issued.

Classification: Internal

What should I do in a laboratory?

Stop active work and, if it can be done immediately and safely, place experiments and hazardous operations into their normal emergency-safe condition. This may include extinguishing flames, closing hood or cabinet sashes, capping containers, securing hazardous materials, and closing gas valves in accordance with the laboratory's approved shutdown procedure. Do not delay sheltering, attempt an unfamiliar shutdown, or remain behind to protect research. Move to the laboratory's designated shelter location, account for personnel, and follow official KAUST instructions.

Should I switch off laboratory ventilation?

Do not switch off fume hoods, biological safety cabinets, clean-room systems, gas cabinets, or other laboratory ventilation unless your approved procedure or an authorized emergency instruction directs you to do so. Facilities and HSE will coordinate building-level ventilation actions. If a ventilation device alarms or loses airflow, stop work if safe, close the sash where appropriate, leave the immediate work area, and report the condition.

What if the office or laboratory has many windows?

A completely windowless room may not be available. Use the best protected location you can reach safely inside the building. Increase your distance from exterior glass, close blinds or shades if available, and use an interior office, meeting room, corridor, or building core where practical. Do not approach windows to observe or record the incident.

What if the building becomes unsafe?

Shelter-in-place does not require you to remain in immediate danger. If there is fire, smoke, a serious spill or release inside your area, structural damage, or another urgent local hazard, activate the appropriate emergency procedure, call KAUST 911 when safe, and follow evacuation or responder instructions. Do not re-enter or resume work until authorized.

Classification: Internal

When may I leave?

Remain sheltered until KAUST issues an official all-clear or directs you to take another action. Do not leave because a meeting, class, shift, or experiment has ended, and do not go outside to retrieve a vehicle, belongings, or another person.

Implementation priorities

KAUST laboratories should coordinate these four operational actions:

1. **Map shelter locations:** Building fire wardens should identify primary and alternate protected areas for open offices, private offices, teaching laboratories, and research laboratories.
2. **Create lab-specific shutdown cards:** Each PI or laboratory manager should maintain a short, posted checklist that distinguishes actions possible in under one minute from longer shutdown actions that must not delay life safety.
3. **Validate HVAC arrangements:** Facilities and HSE should document building-by-building controls, particularly for high-containment, cleanroom, pressure-controlled, and high-hazard laboratories.
4. **Train and exercise:** Building fire wardens, supervisors, PIs, lab managers, and reception or front desk personnel should practice notification, movement, accountability, hazard escalation, and the transition from shelter-in-place to evacuation or lockdown.

Classification: Internal