

HAVING A SERVICE DOG IN A RESEARCH LABORATORY

This is a compilation of our experience in hosting a service dog in a biochemistry lab. It by no means attempts to suggest guidelines but is meant to share our experience at the hope that it can help other members of the research community.

To start there is no one solution. Much would depend on the nature of your work, the physical space in which you plan to work and of course your colleagues. Your objective is to minimize the potential hazardous situations for your dog while in lab while meeting your needs and allowing you two to stay together.

Assess your comfort level with whether the dog may be located nearby but not directly in the laboratory. If you feel comfortable consider leaving the dog in the student office – it is the safest for your dog. If that is not a possibility then you need to contact Environmental health and safety (EHS) as early as possible and start a dialog. Not all Universities and schools have a policy in place so the more examples you find of accommodations for dogs in service labs the better.

EHS is responsible not only for your safety but also that of your colleagues and your dog! Some of the things they would consider is whether there is a convenient safety shower large enough to wash the dog in case of a contamination, whether the dog may get concerned if there are unfamiliar sounds or smells, whether it will grow alarmed if you left the lab (many research labs utilize several rooms and most likely your dog can not accompany you to all), does the dog wear booties etc. The closer you work with EHS the easier the process of finding a solution that would work for everyone.

Our lab focuses on biochemistry and has low hazard level. One solution that worked for us was to have the dog placed in a cage near the door. We build a platform that allowed us to roll the dog in and out of the laboratory in his cage. The dog got into the cage in the hall. This way we minimized contact of the dog with potential contaminations. Our experience was that (our very beloved) dog was very comfortable and learned rapidly that its owner needs to move between different labs. In less than a week our dog was a full-fledged lab member and did not mind lab activities. Here is our setup:









OTHER THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

1. Email your group members (ideally your mentor can help here) and ask if there are any allergies or other concerns about the dog. Let group members know the basic conduct rules such as not feeding the dog without permission, patting rules etc.
2. Locate ahead of time a space where the dog can drink or eat safely (typically the student office but if not then outside the building).
3. If possible, bring the dog ahead of time and introduce him/her to their routine. Once the dog is familiar with the routine it would feel more comfortable allowing you to navigate in this new setting.
4. Circumstances change and you and EHS should continue your dialog to accommodate new situations.