

How to plan, relocate biotech lab space

BY BOB KEELEY

The logistics of finding a suitable space, designing and building it, and then coordinating relocation are enough to cause headaches for anyone involved. Still, it could be worse — if you were a pharmaceutical or biotech company.

Here are a few tips to make the relocation process of your biotech firm or lab space smooth and uneventful.

- **Small stuff.** Make a detailed space plan showing where everything will go. Don't ignore the small stuff. For example, gas distribution, acid waste and electrical systems could be crucial in order to make the new space usable. Older equipment may need cord caps and receptacles replaced due to code changes. Certain equipment has specific voltage requirements, and those must be addressed during construction, not on move day.

Additionally, safety concerns such as proper venting and biohazard disposal must be addressed — particularly if the new space is part of a multi-tenant facility.

- **Relocation.** Major moving concerns of biotech companies involve two areas: the moving of the equipment, and the moving of actual works and other ongoing research projects.

- **Equipment.** Much of the equipment is delicate and precise by nature. One can't simply pack up an electron microscope or centrifuge and ship it across town, and no one wants to take any unnecessary risks with a \$1 million piece of equipment. Proper handling is of the utmost concern.

Moving these items usually involves re-listing the same product vendor who provided the equipment, ensuring that proper procedure is followed not only in moving the apparatus but with reassembly and calibration at the new location. These vendors must be scheduled long in advance.

- **Lab work.** Downtime is generally a concern but it is even more of an issue when it comes to moving lab work. Tissue cultures and samples, which must be kept in a frozen or refrigerated state, must be

dealt with in the timeliest of fashions. Failure to maintain temperature can result in losing years of work, along with the millions of dollars of research that went into it.

And unlike a delicate piece of equipment, these works can never be fully replaced. They are created under a precise set of circumstances, and as the technology evolves, such circumstances can't be re-created. Freezers must be prepared well in advance, and it is imperative that the receiving site be ready to re-start everything upon arrival. If units cannot be brought back to temperature in a timely manner, backup units must be ready.



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- **Project coordination.** Again, it all comes back to the details. Any discrepancies with coordination can lead to myriad problems, ranging from something as minor as lost man-hours to something as major as losing years of research.

Ensuring a successful relocation for biotech or pharmaceutical companies is all about details. Concerns that never occur with most relocation projects must be not only anticipated but accounted for months in advance.

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