Incident Summary:
EHS initiated a campus-wide disposal initiative for time-sensitive chemicals. A container of perchloric acid was flagged to EHS as a time-sensitive chemical of unknown age, origin, and in unknown condition. EHS provided detailed instructions; lab personnel posted a “Do not touch” note on the container. Despite the note, the container was handed over to departmental staff and subsequently Hazardous Materials Services (HMS) for routine disposal. The chemical was later found to be in good condition.

Investigation Findings:
• Lab personnel did not fully recognize the hazards/risks associated with the chemical container and moved it despite the warning note
• Lab personnel, staff, and HMS were exposed to a potentially explosive chemical of unknown risk

Actions Taken:
• EHS published a Lab Safety Program Standard with guidance on time-sensitive chemicals
• A third-party contractor was hired to safely remove other items of concern from labs

Key Takeaways:
• Properly manage time-sensitive chemicals including regular monitoring for signs of degradation and timely disposal when no longer required
• Inform yourself and others about the hazards and risks associated with time-sensitive chemicals present in the laboratory
• Do not handle containers of time-sensitive chemicals in unknown conditions

Resources:
• Chemical Storage and Waste Handling Standard