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**Executive Vice President for Research**

### **RFU On-Site Research Resumption Policies 6-3-2020**

The purpose of this document is to guide faculty, staff, and students toward the partial resumption of laboratory research at RFU. We are planning to partially resume on-site research operations, according to the guidelines and principles that are described in this document on Monday, June 15<sup>th</sup>. Please note that these guidelines do not replace but rather supplement other university policies which will be forthcoming shortly regarding “rules” for entering the building, screening forms, etc. Also, please be aware that the researchers will not be the only group on campus, as other essential educational activities are being scheduled that will occur within other areas of our campus.

#### ***General Principles***

Our top priority is public health - the health of RFU personnel, the health of the city and the region. Premature repopulation of our campus to an unsafe level could cause a rebound in infection rates. Moreover, our plans must align with the Governor’s Restore Illinois Phasing Plan, CDC recommendations, and best practices developed by other research universities across the nation (e.g., GRAND group of the AAMC). A return to the previous **normal** level of activity is unlikely during the duration of this pandemic. We must understand that the practice of laboratory research will not be the same as it was, and that we need to develop new ways of reducing physical interactions until this pandemic has receded. Furthermore, new waves of infection may occur in the coming months and particularly in the Fall/Winter, and we must be prepared to return to lower levels of lab activity if/when required.

**One core principle** during the resumption of on-site research is that returning to campus is voluntary. No-one should be pressured to work on-site if they are uncomfortable doing so, and there should be no disciplinary or retaliatory action taken against anyone who prefers not to return to work due to concerns about infection. Each lab member must be directly asked by their supervisor if they are willing to return, emphasizing that the decision is up to them and that this is voluntary. For further advice on this issue: SGPS Graduate students and postdocs should contact Dr. Joseph DiMario (Dean of the Graduate School), all other Researchers should contact either the Research Deans for their Schools and/or Dr. Ronald Kaplan (Executive Vice President for Research); Staff should consult HR.

**A second core principle** is that we each have a personal and a community responsibility to keep ourselves safe and our work environment safe. We are in this together. This is manifested in such actions as: Do not come into work when you are feeling ill, follow all distancing and PPE guidelines, help our colleagues to be compliant and point out to them and/or administration when they are not, offer suggestions for improved practices, etc.

#### **Specific On-Site Research Resumption Policies**

**1. Continuation of Remote Work.** The resumption of on-site research activities is not meant to replace work that can be done remotely. We need to keep building and office occupancy to a minimum. Therefore, research faculty, staff, and graduate students should not be returning to

their offices. The only personnel who should return on-site at this time are those who are engaged in laboratory-based research.

All group meetings, faculty-student project discussions and seminars should continue to be conducted electronically (Zoom, Google Hangout, FaceTime, etc.).

Non-laboratory based research support staff (e.g., research coordinators and administrative assistants) will continue mainly working from home, but may come into their offices on an as-needed basis to assist with those aspects of their jobs that can most effectively be conducted on-site. No office should become a congregation location for multiple individuals.

**2. Limits on office use and occupancy.** As noted above, office work should mainly continue to take place remotely. For those engaged in laboratory work, and for rare research tasks requiring access to individual offices, **office occupation should be limited to one person at a time.**

With respect to the IRP graduate student and postdoctoral office cubicles within each center, they can be occupied at a density of every other cubicle so that an interpersonal distance of >6 feet is maintained at all times.

**3. Limit in person interactions through social distancing and management of laboratory staff density.**

**A) PIs are responsible for setting shifts so that all personnel in their laboratories are able to maintain social distancing, and that they sanitize all equipment and surfaces that they use at the beginning and end of their shifts.**

- Each lab will determine and limit the number of personnel in the lab at one time in order to maintain interpersonal distance criterion (interpersonal separation distances of >6 feet) and to minimize overlap in the use of equipment.
- In open lab space no more than one person per lab bay arranged such that there is at least 6 feet of distancing (in all directions). Individuals in adjacent bays should not directly face one another but rather should be offset to the maximum extent possible. In situations where one is concerned as to whether 6 feet of distancing can be maintained at all times, face shield should be worn. See attached figures.
- In a more traditional laboratory room, no more than one person per 200 sq ft of lab space will be allowed at any one time.
- Individual PIs can request exceptions to these limits but they must be justified and approved by the Center Director (CMS) or Departmental Chair (other schools), and the Executive Vice President for Research and the SGPS Dean when the exception applies to a graduate student.
- It is understood that some complex experiments, as well as the training of new lab members, require teamwork between at least two people. These interactions are allowed when necessary, but should be minimized whenever possible. If these

procedures are absolutely necessary, the individuals involved are required to wear full PPE (i.e., masks, gloves **and a face shield**) and should treat each other as if they have COVID-19 but are asymptomatic.

***B) Scheduling and coordination of work hours.*** To allow multiple people to sequentially occupy the allotted space, each laboratory should develop an online calendar to schedule work shifts throughout the day and on weekends, bearing in mind that safety is a concern for people working late at night. The structure of these schedules and the length of shifts can be flexible, depending on the type of experiment and the needs of the lab. **Another option is for specific people to reserve certain days of the week.** Examples: two shifts 7am-3pm, 3:30pm-11:30pm. Or alternate days for staff. ***Overnight shifts (e.g. midnight to 8am) are to be avoided.***

**Schedule/Calendar Development** – Each PI should develop a schedule indicating the space that specific individuals within their laboratory will occupy on a given day. These schedules should be placed onto a shared electronic calendar. The calendars amongst all labs within a center must be shared and approved by the Center Director. Finally, where there are multiple centers residing on a given floor (i.e., the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the IRP) the two Center Directors must share their calendars and collaboratively look for areas and times of excessive population density especially in common equipment or procedure rooms (**e.g., tissue culture rooms, cold rooms, dark rooms, animal procedure rooms; for each of these rooms 1 person at a time only**) and make appropriate adjustments. **Always being mindful of the required interpersonal distancing.** For any PIs needing help with calendar development Patty Loomis and Scott Surridge are available to assist. These calendars will be used by all occupants to monitor and plan activities in the lab and on the floors. All center and laboratory calendars will need to be submitted to and approved by the Executive Vice President for Research before research activities can begin. **Importantly, please note that calendars must be updated in real time to reflect what is actually occurring as they may constitute an important source of data should contact tracing be required.**

For those laboratories that will be utilizing the BRF or other core facilities, please submit your proposed **on-line use schedules for each room** to the head of each facility for approval.

**Lab staff should understand that their time in the lab is limited and that they have to make the most of it. Furthermore:**

*i)* Lab members should communicate openly and often (by text or other messaging systems) to coordinate and adjust schedules as necessary and to be sure that they avoid each other. Everyone should complete work within their shift and not work during others' shifts.

*ii)* Lab members should plan ahead to maximize the use of their limited bench time, and they should do their notebook updating and other desktop activities when they return home.

iii) Lab members should be encouraged to help their lab mates by doing minor tasks and experiments that will reduce the need for others to come in to the lab.

iv) Each lab member's bench and desk space ***is private and should not be used by other lab members, so that it can be viewed as a safe space free of contamination.***

#### **4. Laboratory safety must also be considered during times of low staff density.**

When developing schedules, one should note that those working with hazardous chemicals or materials are encouraged not to work alone and not to work at off hours when fewer people are present. Establish a buddy system with someone in a neighboring space or lab, or use check in/check out by phone or text with the PI or another laboratory member.

Center Directors (CMS) Department Chairs (COP, SCPM, CHP) must ensure that plans meet the RFU distancing criteria indicated above, and that adjacent labs are coordinating efforts.

**5. It is the responsibility of all researchers to wipe down all surfaces that they touched before leaving** – including door handles, drawer handles, light switches, faucets, common equipment, lab benches, centrifuge dials, microscope eyepieces, etc. Identify best practice for delicate or electronic surfaces (e.g., microscope) to prevent damage. Typically, a 70% EtOH solution is adequate for inactivating the virus (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK214356/>).

#### **6. Shared Equipment/Common Spaces**

**A. Shared equipment and spaces** (e.g. tissue culture hoods, dark rooms, cold rooms, animal procedure rooms in the IRP, etc.) should be used based on an online signup system. As indicated above, there should be only one person in these rooms at any one time. For example, cell culture rooms with multiple hoods should have no more than one person working in them. Notify the next person on the list that you are finished by using text messaging. Phone numbers should be provided by PIs and Center Directors as required. It is the responsibility of each person to clean all surfaces with disinfectant after usage.

**B. Break rooms will be closed** and no food is to be stored in the refrigerators. Food that you bring for a snack or a lunch break should be stored and eaten in your office. Water coolers in Center/Departmental offices can be utilized. Hand sanitizer will be placed immediately adjacent to each water cooler and should be used immediately before each use of the cooler.

**C. Conference room use is not allowed during this initial re-opening period and will be kept locked.** Group meetings or individual 1:1 meetings should be conducted remotely rather than on site.

**D. Mindfulness on elevators and stairwells.** Elevators are single occupancy. For those stairwells that are designated as two-way individuals should attempt to minimize passing one another either by exiting the stairwell when needed to maintain social distancing or if the stairwell is sufficiently wide such as at a floor by moving to the side to allow another individual to pass.

**7. Choice of lab members who return to work.** It is anticipated that with the appropriate development of spacing plans and implementation of shifts that all laboratory members who feel comfortable returning to the laboratory will be able to be accommodated **with the following limitations:**

**A.** Summer research students (CMS, CLEAR, CHP, COP) will not be permitted to conduct on-site research activities this summer. In most cases, offsite scholarly activities have already been designed for these students with their faculty mentors.

**B.** Undergraduate students, high school students, and volunteers will not be allowed in the laboratories until further notice.

In the unlikely event that there are limitations regarding the number of laboratory members that can be accommodated based on the above guidelines the following priorities should be followed:

*i)* Trainees (PhD students and postdocs) should be given top priority due to the need to complete their research projects in a timely fashion.

*ii)* Consideration should be given to the well-being of young trainees and staff who live alone in small apartments and might benefit greatly from the ability to come to work.

*iii)* Consideration should be given to junior research faculty who are trying to establish their careers and need every bit of time for experimentation that is possible, as well as for more senior faculty who have upcoming grant deadlines and need to complete experiments to meet a paper submission or a grant submission deadline.

*iv)* Consider occasional replacement of personnel in the schedule with new people, to allow as many lab staff as possible to enjoy some progress in their projects.

**8. RFU Research Support Staff and Core Facilities** - The reopening of laboratory research will require additional support staff for glassware washing, autoclaving, package delivery (to be handled by research support staff and/or laboratory personnel), and other tasks, as well as for the RFU core facilities to get up and running. Accordingly, as the resumption of onsite research begins, we plan to increase the level of onsite support and the resumption of function of the core facilities to meet the needs of our researchers, however please note that there may be delays in ramping up some supply lines. Furthermore, these added services will lead to increased population density and social interactions. The numbers of support staff will be kept to a minimum wherever possible. **Note: for studies involving animal surgeries or animal behavior disposable surgical face masks should be utilized rather than the reusable cloth masks.**

**9. Studies Involving Human Subjects** – Prior to resumption of on-site human subject research please consult with Kristen Schneider and Monica Oblinger for specific guidelines. At a minimum consent forms will need to be revised to address the increased risk, distancing precautions instituted, and procedures implemented similar to those utilized enabling RFU personnel to be present on campus. Human subjects will not be able to come onto campus until guests generally are allowed on campus.

**10. PPE requirements - Cloth face masks are required at all times in common areas** (hallways, restrooms, elevators, break areas, open lab spaces). Face masks must be worn in public and any time there is more than one person in a given space, including times of brief interaction between co-workers, and anytime another person might even temporarily be within six feet. Employees working alone in their office do not need to wear a mask. **When conducting laboratory experiments, if personnel anticipate they may encounter circumstances where the >6 feet distancing may be challenging, it is required that they also wear a face shield.** Clean and disinfect personal and shared work areas (desktop, keyboards, chairs, etc.) before and after use. Treat everything as if it is contaminated. Wash hands frequently. Avoid touching face, eyes and mouth.

**A. Availability of Masks and Cleaning supplies.** Three cloth masks will be distributed to all RFU employees upon entering our buildings. Disinfection supplies, depending upon availability, will be provided by Facilities and Maintenance. Clean all areas before and after use for the next user. Face shields will be provided initially as needed by EHS and the Office of the EVPR, but thereafter will the responsibility of the Center Directors and Department Chairs.

**B. Sterilizing wipes will be provided when available** at central locations in the Research Buildings. Lab workers should be instructed to wipe down common touch points as they begin work and when their work is done.

**C. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds!**

**11. Covid19 Testing** – All RFU personnel will be required to be tested for Covid19 and show proof of a negative test result obtained within 7 days prior to that individual’s return to work. Testing is available at multiple locations including by appointment at the RFU Health System Clinic (Tel: 224-570-7575).

**12. Monitoring Compliance** - Based on excellent compliance with current research shutdown policies, we are confident that faculty, staff, and students understand the importance of these onsite research resumption policies and will operate within their labs accordingly. EHS staff will perform spot checks to help support the labs and centers responsibilities in ensuring compliance with these policies especially as it relates to appropriate distancing and use of PPE. In the cases of infractions, faculty will be required to modify staff schedules or take other measures to minimize risk of transmission. Moreover, **if any personnel** see circumstances where the above guidelines are not being followed (e.g., personnel not wearing masks in common spaces, inappropriate social distancing, inattention to scheduling in common rooms, or other examples of noncompliance) please feel free to report these violations to Human Resources. Your concern will be treated with confidentiality and sensitivity. Failure of personnel within a laboratory to repetitively follow these guidelines (PIs will receive two warnings) will result in a suspension of onsite laboratory activities for a period of time (lasting a minimum of two weeks) to be determined by the Executive Vice President for Research followed by reopening with monitoring.

**13. Ongoing Communication** – The Executive Vice President for Research will set up a weekly, 30 minute video call (zoom) session where faculty can ask any pressing research questions. A newsletter will be sent to faculty with the answers to questions raised as well as updates to the status of on-site research resumption guidelines as frequently as needed. Currently this is envisioned to occur at a frequency of at least every two weeks. **Please be aware that we expect to modify these guidelines in real time as needed.**

# Spacing in Laboratories

Bench in foreground has desirable feature of lab staff facing same direction with no one face-to-face. Remaining bays may need to implement staggered work stations. In some laboratory configurations assigning personnel to work spaces that alternate or are on opposite ends of a single bay may be appropriate.

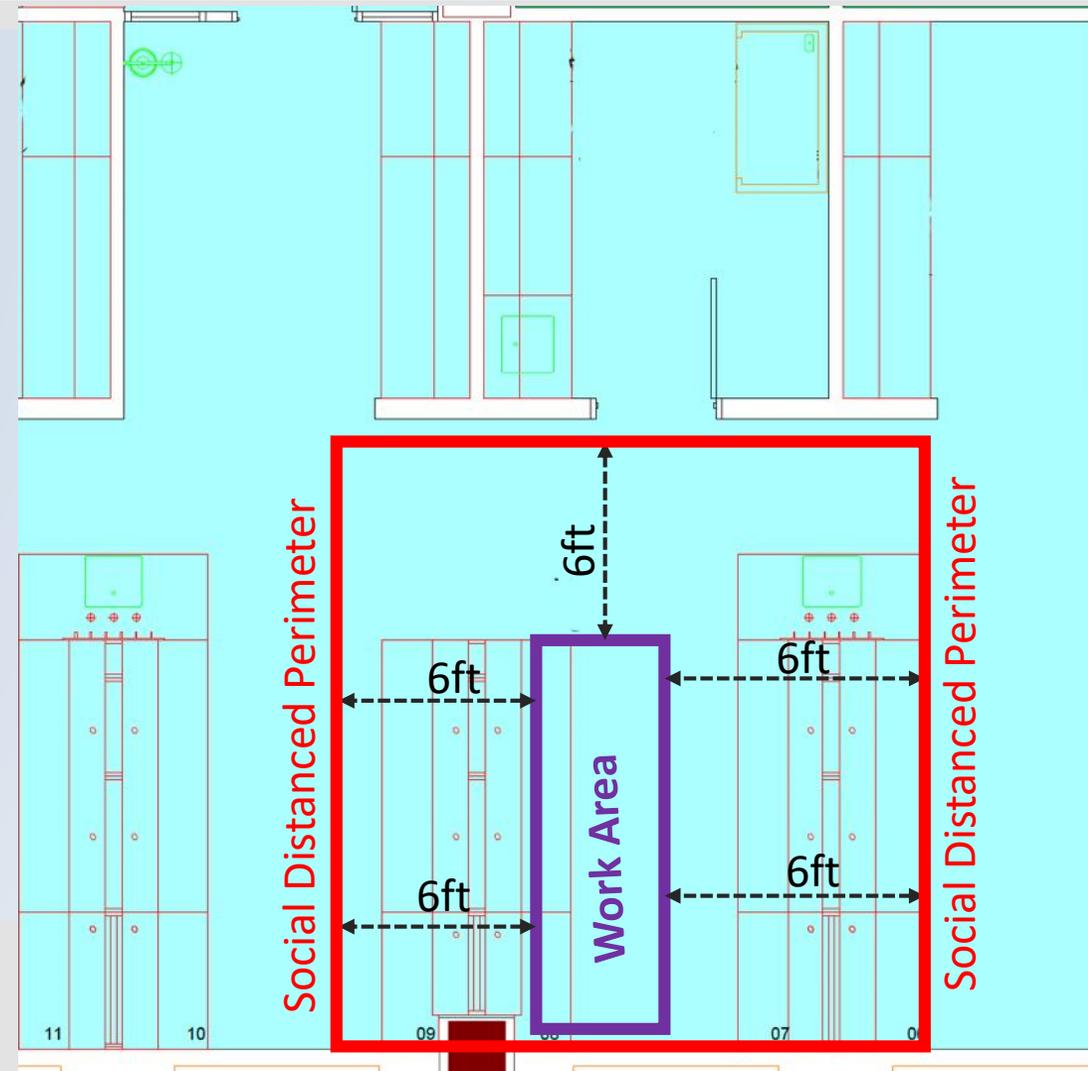


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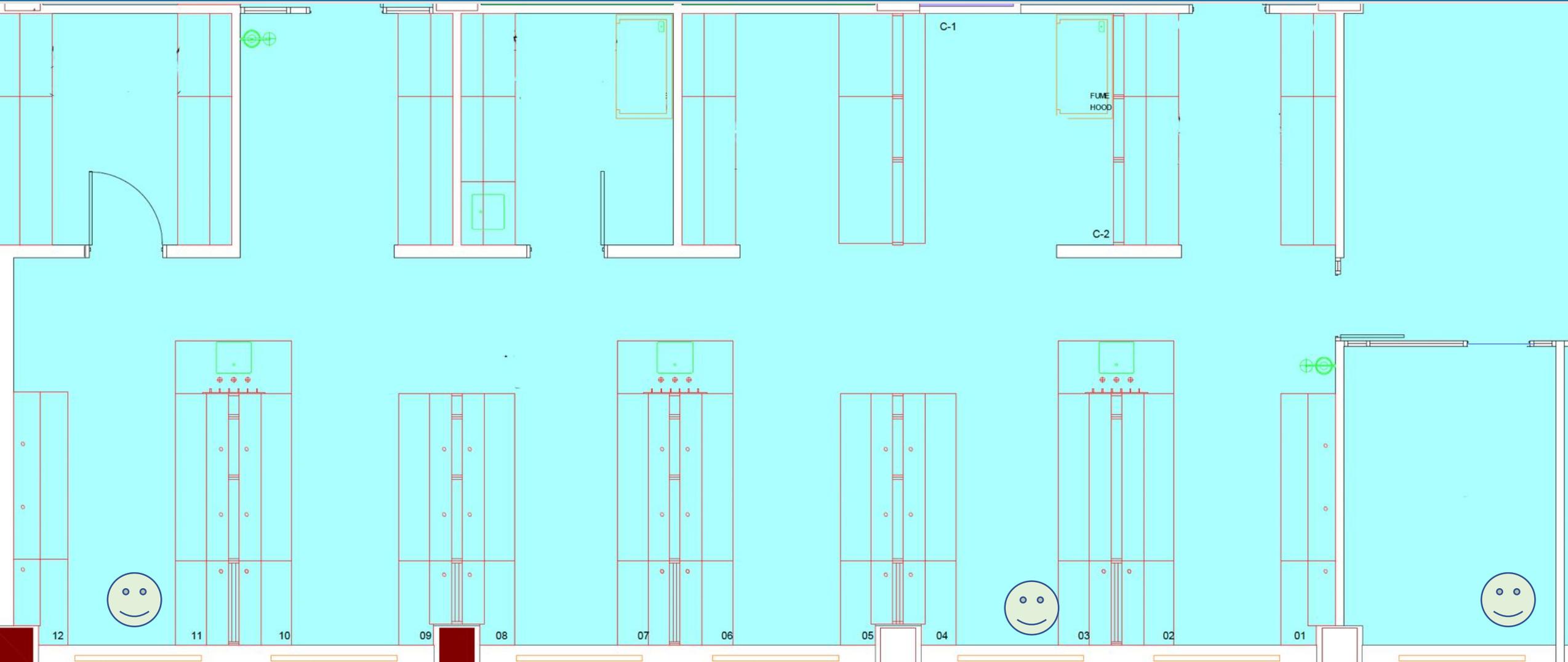
When considering how dense people can be, it should be a 6ft perimeter from their work area, not from a single point in that area.

In addition, if people are moving around a lot in the lab, that work area, and the safe perimeter becomes larger.

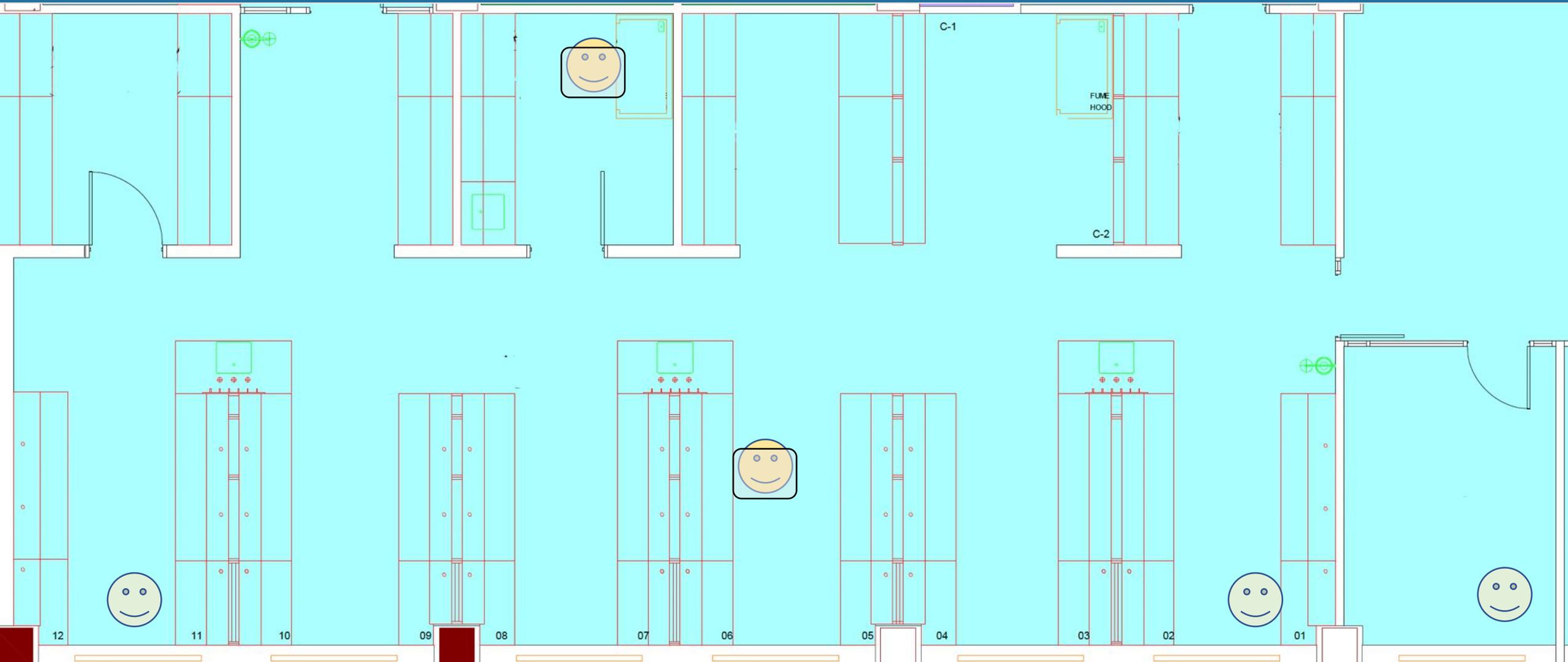
- In general, 1 person/ 200 ft<sup>2</sup> of bench space will work.
- Face shields are recommended as personnel density increases.



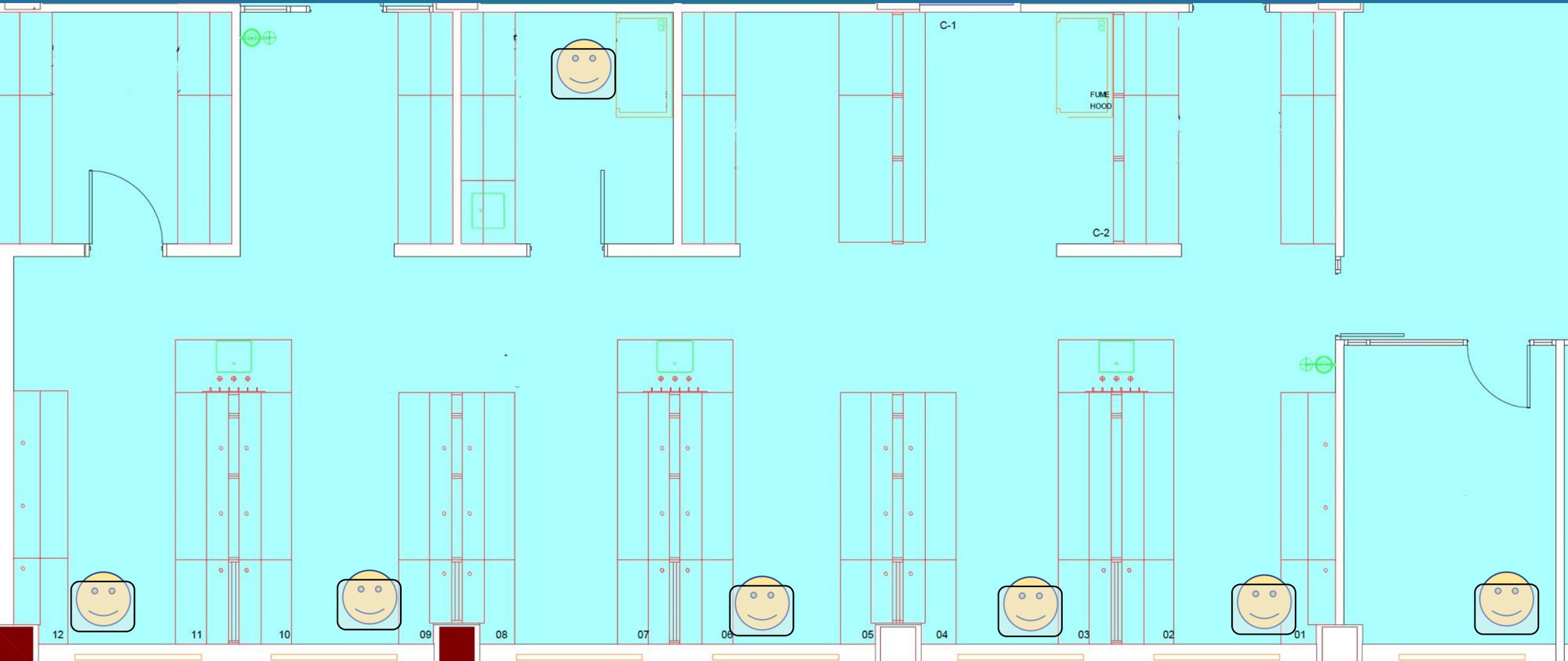
An example of an excellent low-density configuration. Individuals can easily control their movements and maintain strict social distancing (>6ft). Note office door is closed.



Good Configuration. This is near capacity but could lead to incidents where  $>6\text{ft}$  distance could be momentarily interrupted. Face shields are recommended unless people stay confined to well defined space where they won't encounter others. They could also put on their shields if they need to move around more.



This is at capacity. It is likely that  $>6\text{ft}$  distance will not be fully maintained. Face shields are required.



This is **not** acceptable. Do not **aim** plan for these situations.

Strict wearing face shields could mitigate this situation, however, currently it is too dense to practice social distancing. This may be change in the future, but not now.

